Promoting User-Friendly Language Equity and Opportunity in the Digital Era of COVID-19 in Los Angeles County

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The overall goal of this project is to improve measures of community participation and engagement by increasing digital access to LEP Los Angeles County residents during COVID-19

OVERVIEW

The Center for Health Equity is an agency that promotes racial, social, environmental and economic justice for all community members, particularly underserved communities, under the Los Angeles Department of Public Health. Given that the population size of Los Angeles County is approximately 10.04 million, limited-English proficient speakers, LEP, account for almost one-third of individuals within the county. According to the US Census Bureau, 17% of households do not have an Internet broadband subscription. Although this number may seem low, many of those unaccounted for are LEP families. LEP are more likely to suffer from disparities as part of racial/ethic minority groups and greater stressors related to ethnicity, gender, education, citizenship and/or discrimination. Although LEP who identify with different communities might experience aforementioned stressors at various levels, these stressors are further exacerbated by lack of digital equity. COVID-19 unveiled the digital divide and intensified the reality of disconnect among LEP in a digitally connected world. This project aims to benefit traditionally underserved communities and would follow an "inclusive investment" model, working toward equity for all communities, particularly, strengthening the inclusion of LEP. The LEP community has been largely underserved and investment within these communities has been extractive, disproportionately affecting BIPOC communities. This proposal works toward a community-centered investment through facilitated access and the promotion of increased participation between community members and LA County liaisons. The increase of participation will increase cultural competency in outreach programs through county efforts.

Map legend:
1. Antelope Valley
2. San Fernando Valley
3. San Gabriel Valley
4. Metro
5. West
6. South
7. East
8. South Bay (Includes Catalina Island)

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this project is to determine the preferred and most user-friendly video conference application by translation and interpretation services and other service organizations in LA County. The most preferred video conference application by these organizations will be recommended to LA County Department of Public Health leadership staff, proposing to remove the current video conference application, Microsoft Teams, and replace it with an improved application that will help facilitate increased community outreach and engagement from county departments. In turn, the Center for Health Equity, in coordination with all public health, mental health and health services staff, will implement future outreach programs and/or services with the preferred video conference application and measure attendance and engagement.

CRITERIA FOLLOWED

- The application should have an easy to use interface. The application should be straightforward in creating a meeting link or dial-in number, sharing with others and adding people to the call.
- The application should feature screen sharing, annotation and live chatting capabilities.
- The application should feature text chat capabilities, thus giving the opportunity to text an individual question in a way that does not interrupt the presenter.
- The application should have a video recording feature in order to involve those who were unable to make the original recorded meeting for any reason. This increases equity by giving those with time conflicts or constraints to access the information received when they are able.
- Though not as imperative as the others, file sharing is a useful tool when interacting with video communication applications.
- Cross-device capability allows for participants to change their media platform, whether it is their laptop computer, desktop or cell phone. Given the strain of busy and impacted work schedules, it is imperative to have the opportunity to change devices, even during the session, in case there are adjustments that need to be made.

RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS

Although it was initially believed that Zoom would be the preferred video conference application according to Business Insider Statista data, our data results also demonstrated that 73.7% of contacted translation and interpretation service organizations preferred Zoom over other video conference applications. Based on these results, Center for Health Equity staff proposed the adoption of Zoom Business to improve multiple measures of digital literacy and community involvement among LEP, contributing to greater advantages in community services and addressing LEP needs. The following were the specific aims proposed to county superiors:

1. **To incorporate Zoom Video Conference's Small and Medium Business package, including the language interpretation feature, as the normative video communication application accessible to Los Angeles County LEP for community outreach events during COVID-19**

2. **To evaluate whether Zoom has beneficial effects on increased presence and participation among Los Angeles County LEP.**

BENEFITS OF THE ZOOM LANGUAGE FEATURE

Zoom is already one of the most recognizable and popular of video communication applications. According to Business Insider Statista data, Zoom ranks third as the most popular video communication application (aside from Facetime and Facebook Messenger, which are not conferencing platforms). The Zoom language interpretation feature also enables original audio simultaneously at a lower volume to facilitate understanding inflections and tones or mute original audio. The interpretation feature is the key component that strengthens the argument of Zoom as the best video conference application in this setting. The ability for participants to adjust the sound of the original audio contributes phonology to morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics to linguistics and the ability for an individual to improve their understanding of language. Furthermore, the simultaneous screen feature also allows for ASL participants to participate as well.