

Hood College

A Broken Bridge: Addressing Lack of Accessible Resources for Immigrants & Refugees

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### **Immigrants and Refugees Face a Lack of Essential Resources**

Immigrants in the United States face numerous hurdles and difficulties in accessing basic and essential resources to maintain a safe and stable quality of life. Migrants and refugees that escape their home countries and enter the United States seek peace and security but are met with multi-leveled barriers. This has only worsened over the past four years under the Trump administration, due to the expansion of the limits on “public charge”, which stated that the government would withhold legalization for undocumented immigrants who had used certain public benefits, resulting in thousands of undocumented immigrants dropping out of welfare programs (Dickerson).

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare access for immigrants and undocumented migrants is extremely inaccessible. Research shows that “barriers to health care for undocumented immigrants [go] beyond policy and range from financial limitations, to discrimination and fear of deportation.” (Hacker et al). Additional reports reveal that immigrants are at increased risk of homelessness due to a lack of accessible resources as well. The Chicago Tribune reported that “many fell into homelessness after becoming ill, fell prey to addiction because of trauma or have mental illness... They come to a place where they are socially isolated, linguistically and culturally isolated; which makes people really high risk for disorders like depression” (Presa).

This behavior is horrifying to witness and demonstrates that consistent advocacy, community efforts, and an increase in accessible resources are necessary to preserve peace for all peoples of the world, regardless of nationality or citizenship status. The United States has always been a haven for immigrants and upheld itself as a nation of equality, freedom, and democracy, and must maintain those values to foster peace and integrity, both nationally and internationally. Therefore, this project aims to help develop a nationwide network of organizations that offer essential resources and social services to immigrants.

### **Providing Migrants with Access to Essential Resources: Project Description**

The objective of this project is to assist an established organization, Raices, with its new resources hotline, Canopy, which is aimed to connect migrants to valuable social services and organizations in their local vicinity, as most undocumented immigrants are ineligible for most welfare programs (Dickerson). Canopy’s objective is to continue to grow and create a national network of immigrant-friendly agencies in an effort to reduce barriers commonly experienced by the community.

As immigrants ourselves, we feel deeply connected to this problem and are eager to utilize our knowledge and skills to help assist Raices and Canopy with their goal of creating a national network of “immigrant-friendly” organizations. The three of us would bring valuable work and bilingual skills to this project, with experience from a research fellowship at the Library of Congress, to working on healthcare and civil advocacy at non-profit organizations. These opportunities have provided us with a comprehensive skill set in communications, public speaking, and qualitative & quantitative research, that would be applicable in helping Raices further develop their Canopy hotline and enrich its services.

We will work with Canopy over the course of nine weeks and utilize funds from the grant to help develop the hotline and launch multiple fundraising initiatives, along with rolling out social media campaigns to help Canopy grow as a platform and gain a stable network of organizations nation-wide. While most of Canopy’s current work is concentrated in Texas and

L.A. they are eager to branch out to the DMV area, as well as other national regions, and we will be tasked with researching viable resources across the United States and doing outreach in order to bridge those connections with Canopy.

Our project will be done remotely and we will use our grant funds and existing connections in the DMV area to help create a bridge with Canopy's current work in Texas, in order to help increase their visibility and services to immigrants in our surrounding area as well. Along with this, we will help Canopy develop a social media presence that will help solidify and document its growth as a nationally-oriented social service hotline. In addition, we will help Canopy develop a "stop-gap" fund, which will be a multi-layered fundraising effort, which will aim to provide financial, medical, transportation, and essential resources to immigrants in emergencies or dire situations, so that nobody "falls through the gap." These funds will utilize money from the grant, which will be used as a base investment to help grow Canopy's national presence and cement a sustainable fundraising strategy.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The results of helping Canopy with our outlined objectives can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Canopy is currently six months old, and has a lot of development planned, which our project will be integral in assisting with. We will be able to track monthly data while working with Canopy, to measure an increase in hotline callers. Since Canopy's main role is connecting callers with essential resources and social services, an increase in calls will display Canopy's overall growth and demonstrate a growing national presence.

Social media metrics can be measured periodically over the course of the project, to show the effectiveness of the campaign and indicate an increase in Canopy's stability as a hotline and resource outlet for immigrants. The social media campaign will also serve to promote community awareness and engagement in Raices and Canopy's work, and can be measured in the data of volunteers gained over the course of the social media campaign, as well as by tracking the development and growth of existing volunteer programs currently under Raices.

Connecting Canopy with immigrant-friendly organizations in the DMV area is an essential part of our project, as is promoting Canopy's hotline overall to the immigrants in the DMV area. We will be able to measure this by collecting caller data and tracking the incline of callers from the DMV region. Furthermore, the growth of Canopy's database of organizations will serve as data that will demonstrate the effectiveness of our project's outreach, research, and promotion efforts.

### **Future Impact and Sustainability**

The impact of this project will extend beyond the range of the summer, and result in a sustainable and comprehensive movement that will allow Canopy and Raices to extend their resources and services on a nation-wide level, directly resulting in a consistently growing number of immigrants and refugees that will gain access to essential resources and social services. Creating the social media campaign will allow Canopy to adopt the template and utilize it for future use. The growth of their connections with other organizations will allow them to work on potential collaborations and social service opportunities for immigrants.

In addition, helping Canopy create a "stop-gap" fund will be especially beneficial for immigrants that require numerous levels of assistance, from food insecurities to transportation issues, but are unable to utilize governmental welfare programs and are at risk of homelessness or combating numerous other serious issues. The "stop-gap" fund will be created with a schedule that will automatically roll out fundraising efforts, to continuously replenish the fund.

This project will have a great impact in our home community too, as a big part of our efforts will concentrate on increasing Canopy's connections in the DMV area, and promoting their services to immigrants and refugees in the DMV area as well.

### Works Cited

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