COVID-19 Rapid Response
Mini-Grant Letter of Request

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In a few brief paragraphs, please explain:

1. What geographic area is served? (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served)

Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA - Farmworker Support Committee) is a non-profit migrant farmworker and low wage immigrant worker organization governed by and comprised of migrant and immigrant workers who are actively engaged in the struggle for better working and living conditions. CATA’s mission is to empower and educate workers through leadership development and capacity building so that they are able to make informed decisions on the best course of action for their interests. For the past 40 years, CATA has been the vehicle through which the farmworker and immigrant community has worked towards achieving social, economic and environmental justice. In the Mid-Atlantic region, CATA has trained tens of thousands of people and engaged them in advocacy campaigns on a variety of issues including: pesticide safety and protection, labor rights including minimum wage, immigrant rights, and organic farming among others. In Pennsylvania specifically, CATA works in southern Chester County, primarily in Kennett Square and the surrounding towns.

2. What population is served, what has been the impact of COVID-19, and how has your nonprofit responded?

CATA works in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States with both the migrant farmworker and low-wage immigrant communities. In Chester County, Pennsylvania, mushroom workers primarily originate from central Mexico including the areas of Guanajuato and Puebla. There has also been an increase in Guatemalan and El Salvadoran workers to the region. Although the majority of workers are men between the ages of fifteen and sixty, there is a growing presence of farmworker families migrating to the area with an increase of younger workers and women working both in the mushroom industry, packing houses, and other low-wage jobs.

CATA’s work relies heavily on face-to-face outreach with the mushroom workers and Latino immigrant populations living in rural communities and farm labor camps where they are often isolated without dependable access to transportation. These efforts help us build trust within the community. The COVID-19 pandemic and Stay-at-Home order has severely limited our ability to conduct the traditional outreach with the Latino community and in providing program activities and advocacy opportunities. Even after the order is lifted, the need for social distancing will still remain until a vaccine and effective therapeutic treatment can be attained. CATA’s challenge is to develop ways to connect with the Latino
community during the pandemic as well as reach the community once the virus is mitigated so that the community and staff are both protected and safe. Mushroom workers and other low-wage Latino workers are considered essential workers and are vulnerable to exposure. In addition, the Latino community is disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 due to underlying health conditions.

Since the end of March, CATA has been calling community members on our contact list to check in with them to see how they and their families are doing during this time. In conjunction, CATA staff has been working remotely in gathering COVID-19 information in Spanish, verifying it, and putting it in a format that can be distributed to the Latino community. CATA is using our website, Facebook, and our low-frequency radio station – RadioCATA. We also held our first Facebook live event regarding COVID-19 for the Latino community with 300+ people viewing it and have since held a series of Facebook live presentations reaching several thousand people.

Starting in the beginning of May, we plan to conduct outreach to the labor camps and communities. We will start with contactless drop-off visits of information in order to reach a larger number of community members and eventually move to visits with social distancing practices. Information we will be distributing include information about COVID-19, an explanation of their rights as essential workers during this time of pandemic, and providing a resource list of assistance available in the community to meet their other needs. CATA has also received donations of masks and bandanas that we will be distributing to the workers for personal protection.

To address our ability to reach the community safely, we intend to increase our use of the technology described above and adapt our programs to be available to the community in a digital format. Given that not everybody has access to technology, we will also be developing organizational policies and procedures on how to conduct outreach and programing on the farm labor camps and in the surrounding communities while maintaining social distancing.

3. How much funding is sought? How does this compare to your annual operating budget? What will the funding be used for? What is the expected timeframe for use of funds?

CATA’s work has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic on various levels. For this request, CATA will focus on Service-Challenged Grant. CATA is requesting $5,000 to assist us in making these transitions in our work. This funding represents approximately 1% of CATA’s operating budget. Funding will be needed for to increase our organizational digital capacity, modify program content to be meaningful and engaging for social media and radio programming platforms, develop organizational policies and procedures, and purchase personal protective equipment for staff and disinfectant supplies. We anticipate a rolling timeframe where we will immediately continue disseminating information to the community on the COVID-19 pandemic. Within 3 to 6 months work on a process of modifying program content for digital and print formats. Also during this time, develop the policies and procedures needed to safely go back out into the community. This timeline will depend on local government orders/recommendations and the trajectory of the pandemic.

In a separate effort, CATA was part of the coordinating committee for the state-wide PA COVID-19 Relief Fund. The fund was developed to assist more than 600 undocumented families across Pennsylvania. CATA will be receiving a portion of the funds raised and disburse 100% to immigrant families in Chester County who are experiencing economic hardships due to reduced hours of work, loss of work, or illness from COVID-19. This support will be essential for the community since they have been left out of government relief bills.