

Considerations for Incorporating Safety Measures in Farmworker Outreach Protocols

Outreach Promising Practice

National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) lists the common components of outreach protocols that help ensure safe, efficient outreach to farmworkers. This compilation of outreach safety protocols is based on learnings from several farmworker-serving organizations and NCFH's own experience conducting outreach with farmworkers.

Organizational Information:

Several organizations provided their own protocols for NCFH to evaluate and create shared outreach safety tips for this promising practice, including:

Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)

Location: Woodburn, Oregon



Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) is an Oregon-based union and empowerment group for farmworkers. Their mission is to support farmworkers and working Latinx families in Oregon by building community, increasing Latinx representation in elections, and policy advocacy on both the national and state levels.

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA)

**Location: Texas, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas,
and Tennessee**



Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) is the nation's second-largest legal aid provider and the largest in Texas. TRLA provides free civil legal services to residents in 68 Southwest Texas counties and represents Migrant and Seasonal farmworkers throughout the state and in six other southern states – Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee.



Community Health Partnership of Illinois (CHP)

Location: Aurora, Illinois



CHP
Community Health
Partnership of Illinois
HEALTH CENTERS

Community Health Partnership of Illinois (CHP) is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) providing high-quality, patient-centered, comprehensive primary care in a setting that is welcoming and responsive to the cultural, language, and health needs of the communities they serve. CHP empowers the uninsured, underserved, and Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers (MSAW) to attain their best health.

National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH)

Location: Buda, Texas



National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) is a private not-for-profit corporation dedicated to improving the health status of farmworker families. NCFH provides information services, training and technical assistance, and a variety of products to community and migrant health centers nationwide, as well as organizations, universities, researchers, and individuals involved with farmworker health.

Collectively, PCUN TRLA, CHP and NCFH engaged a total of 58,892 farmworkers throughout 2022-2023.

Description of Practice

Outreach staff all across the country visit farms, community sites, and housing sites to deliver up-to-date, accurate, and reliable resources and services to farmworkers. Providing these services is crucial to closing the gap in health disparities. However, reaching immigrant workers in rural areas can be difficult and sometimes dangerous. Outreach workers may encounter hostile employers or business owners, inclement weather, washed-out roadways, snakes, aggressive dogs, pesticide exposure, and other hazards. This profile highlights outreach safety strategies for farmworker-serving outreach staff, including some key challenges and how to address them. The strategies outlined below are written to be included directly in outreach manuals or shared among field staff.

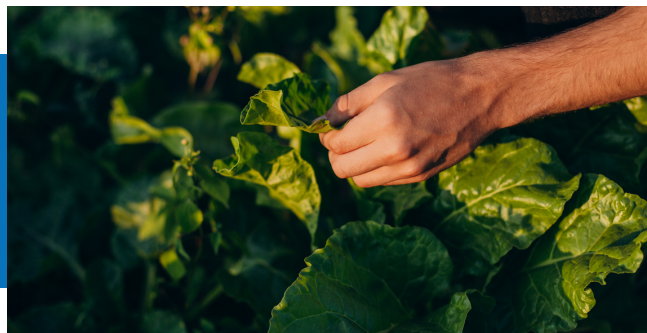
Key Strategies

General Safety Guidelines

- **The key rule for outreach is: If you are uncomfortable, leave.**
 - Always trust your instincts. If you are in doubt or feel unsafe about a location or an individual, discuss these apprehensions with your outreach group or supervisor.
- **Conduct outreach in pairs or groups.**
 - Never go to a housing site or worksite alone. Designate one person not on the outreach trip to be the home-base staff whose role is to be on-call to support field staff. If you feel comfortable enough to visit a community site alone and cannot go with an outreach partner, share your live location via WhatsApp with your outreach team and the designated home-base staff when entering rural areas alone. Keep in mind that cell service may be spotty in rural areas. Make sure the names and addresses of the sites you visit are shared with your outreach team before heading out in case you do not have service while conducting outreach.
- **Bring appropriate clothing and gear if visiting work or housing sites.**

Dress appropriately for outreach. It's important to be both comfortable and approachable.

 - Always wear close-toed shoes on all site visits. It is important to have sturdy shoes for both mobility and protection from any potential hazards.
 - Pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended for farm visits. Long clothing is important to protect the skin from potential hazards onsite and maintain professionalism. Dresses and shorts are acceptable if the climate is hot.
 - Hats are recommended, especially if the climate is sunny or hot.
 - Bring plenty of drinking water for your outreach group and extra to give to workers.
 - Pack a first aid kit for emergencies.



Housing Site Safety

Arriving at workers' homes can be intimidating if you do not have previous experience with conducting outreach. Common housing site hazards include getting lost, aggressive dogs, hostile employers or housing owners, and hazards that could cause you to slip or fall. Below are some tips for safe outreach at housing sites:

- Scope sites before your visits. Drive by the site to make sure it looks like the right location. Make sure that you can quickly enter and exit the site safely, and look for any apparent issues (i.e., gated and locked entrance, no trespassing signs, etc.).
- Do NOT drive down long easements (very long rural driveways) unless you or your partner know the location well, have visited recently, and know that it is safe.
- Do NOT enter workers' homes. Some exceptions can be made if the outreach team is comfortable doing so and you can do so in pairs. Make sure that no one in the home has COVID-19. Always wear a mask indoors.
- Other housing site safety tips:
 - Always stay within the eyesight of at least one outreach partner.
 - Do not enter sites where “No Trespassing” signs are posted.
 - You do not need the employer's permission to be at a housing site, but if the workers are uncomfortable with you being there, you should leave.
 - Park so you can leave quickly.
 - Reverse park, meaning to back into a parking space so that the front of your car is facing forward, or park facing the exit.
 - The driver should keep their keys handy in case you have to leave very quickly (i.e., on their belt loop).
 - Familiarize yourself and your team with local and state laws regarding outreach and visiting worker housing sites.



Worksite Safety

All housing site guidelines also apply to worksites, but some extra precautions are needed for worksites.

- Be aware of pesticide labels and signs.
- Do NOT enter a site if you see a sign saying that the field has been recently sprayed or if you see planes flying low overhead in the area.
- Be always aware of natural hazards, such as snakes, scorpions, poison ivy, etc.
- Do not enter the worksite if you have to open a gate.



“No Trespassing sign” outside of a melon farm in Mission, TX

Encountering Employers, Business Owners, or Crew Leaders

In many cases, farmworker-serving organizations have great relationships with employers where both parties actively work together to serve workers. Unfortunately, not all employers are as welcoming to visitors for different reasons. Outreach teams should respect private property and not enter if “no trespassing” signs are visible to avoid potentially difficult situations. If you encounter a hostile employer, do not tell them the workers invited you onto the property as this could cause the employer to retaliate against the workers.

In scenarios where outreach vehicles are blocked by employers or employers call the police for property trespassing, consider the following to de-escalate the situation and keep yourself and your team safe:

- Leave immediately if the individual is threatening or enacting verbal or physical violence. Call 911 if needed. Notify your supervisor as soon as it is safe to do so.
- If the individual is not threatening physical violence, stay calm and explain your purpose for being on the worksite. Emphasize that outreach is for health education, and you are not there to sell anything.
- Use your best judgment – if the employer is calming down, you can try to build a bridge and discuss resources for employers that your organization can offer. If the employer is still very upset, you can: 1) offer for them to contact your program supervisor or 2) offer to leave immediately.
- Be mindful of workers who may not wish to be interrupted while working.
- Our presence on the farm should never compromise the safety or work of the workers. DO NOT tell the employer that workers gave you permission to be there, even if they did. Farmworkers may be observing the interaction and may have a real fear of retaliation. Remember that the goal of the visit is to build trust-based relationships. It is important that outreach staff act with discretion and always in solidarity with the worker.
- It is very important to know the history between the organization and employers. Document outstanding incidents at both housing sites and work sites so other staff members in your organization are aware of prior incidents in case individuals plan to visit the same sites again. Consider making a list of these places and always share them with your team.

“When we come across an employer [who do not want outreach organizations on site], we never debate with them. We let them know that if they change their mind in allowing us to talk to workers, we are there to assist workers with their healthcare needs. It’s better to leave the doors open.”
-Fernando Molina, Outreach Coordinator, Community Health Outreach Partnership of Illinois

Community Site Safety



Outreach staff engage farmworkers outside a money transfer establishment in Immokalee, Florida.

- Do not enter sites that appear unsafe (e.g., apparent drug deals, physical fights, etc.). Consider parking your car facing a direction where you can leave quickly. Reverse park, meaning to back into a parking space so that the front of your car is facing forward, or park facing the exit.
- If you are in front of a small business, go inside, explain to staff what you are doing, and ask for permission to be there.
- If you and your team are conducting outreach at night, stay in a well-lit area and always within eyesight of each other.

Sexual Harassment

While assuming good intentions, gender dynamics and the power relationships that define them should not be ignored. Sexual harassment may not be a common occurrence during outreach; however, the outreach team must have a plan and discuss it with their staff in case a sexual harassment situation arises among community members towards outreach staff. Prioritize doing outreach in pairs and always keep tabs on your partner.

Everyone has their own comfort level, and all are legitimate. Teams and individuals should adapt the following recommendations to meet their personal and team needs.

- **Verbal advances:** If verbal advances occur, you have the right to calmly and firmly state to the community member that you wish for the conversations to remain professional and that you will not tolerate advances. You can ask your outreach partner to join you, or you can leave the situation.
- **Physical advances:** Physical touching should not be tolerated. Do not tolerate unwanted actions if a community member touches you inappropriately or tries to get you into a car or their house. Tell them their actions/behavior will not be accepted, leave the situation immediately, and stick close to your outreach partner or group. If they continue to make advances, all outreach members should leave the site immediately.
- **Remote advances:** If sexual harassment occurs over the phone (calls, texts, etc.), explain to the community member that these advances are not wanted but that you can communicate about professional topics. If the worker continues their advances discuss the situation with your supervisor. If the problem persists, you can block the community member from contacting you. If you do not feel comfortable sharing your personal number with community members and do not have a work number, set up a Google Voice number. This way, you can easily screen the calls you provide community members during outreach, if necessary, and they will not have access to your personal phone number.
- Any time you are uncomfortable, please discuss the situation with your supervisor.

Other Outreach Challenges

Outreach staff have identified and reported the following challenges:

- Outbreaks of infectious diseases, including COVID-19 and other diseases like chickenpox, occur in communities. With a growing and aging population of farmworkers, outreach staff must be extra conscientious about exposing workers to different types of infectious diseases. Outreach staff can share vaccine information and encourage workers to vaccinate themselves for additional protection. Frequent hand-washing and use of hand sanitizer can also help mitigate the risk of infection. Similarly, outreach staff should protect themselves by staying up-to-date with their vaccines before embarking on outreach.
- Inclement weather during outreach can result in plans changing. Being flexible if plans change is key. If housing locations are hard to reach due to muddy roads, wait to travel through county roads that may leave you stranded until conditions have improved. Instead, visit community sites or more accessible sites. If outreach advocates have phone numbers of workers, this may be a good time to call or text those who may be grocery shopping or doing laundry on a rainy day.
- Spotty or unreliable cell phone signal can be an issue in rural areas. Print out maps and directions to the housing location address to have a hard copy of where you are going. Locals can help direct the way if your GPS is no longer reliable.



Resources Needed and Expenses

Most of these tips can be implemented without cost, but some additional resources for consideration are described below:

- **COVID-19:** Make COVID-19 rapid tests available for staff. Encourage staff to take a rapid test periodically and when they are exposed to COVID-19.
- **Hotels for overnight stays:** If an outreach trip consists of multiple days away from home, it may be worth packing a bag and staying overnight, especially if you would have to return home on rural roads late at night. Choose a hotel based on location and proximity to outreach sites to save time. Depending on the location, a 4-5 star rated hotel can cost anywhere between \$80-150 per night.
- **Rental car or reliable vehicle:** A rental car is recommended but unnecessary if advocates are willing and have reliable vehicles for mileage compensation. However, it may be in the organization's best interest to rent a vehicle for staff, as outreach trips sometimes consist of traveling long distances. The average cost of an economical rental car is \$98 per day.
- **Technology:** Technology is needed to do effective outreach. Advocates must have cell phones or iPads with Google maps or a GPS device to navigate from place to place. Research which carriers have the best coverage in your outreach service area. Outreach staff may use their personal cell phones with compensation. Download free messaging apps such as WhatsApp on your phone to share your location with coworkers and keep in touch with workers who travel internationally.



Partnerships

If you have the opportunity, contact other local groups who have relationships with farm workers. Consider innovative partnerships including food vendors selling food to workers, laundromats, or cash transfer business attendants. They may have information about best times to find and connect with farmworkers on any given day.

Faith-based leaders are great partners and trusted members of the community. Faith-based leaders may open their doors for your organization to leave flyers or speak to their congregation, which may include farmworkers.

Depending on the type of outreach and the type of services provided by your organization, engaging employers as part of the outreach strategy can facilitate access to farms and help establish future collaborations for health fairs and other on-farm events.

Learn More

Website: [National Center for Farmworker Health](http://NationalCenterforFarmworkerHealth.org)

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Pro Tip:

Charge cell phones and gas up! Keep your cell phone charged and enough gas in your vehicle, especially when traveling to unknown rural areas. Have a phone that is easy to access. Share your location with your outreach partner or home base during the outreach trip.

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