The Information Project:

Rapid Response Pilot

JANUARY 2024

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Executive Summary

Over a six-week period during November and December 2023, the Information Futures Lab (IFL) from Brown University's School of Public Health and a Miami-based community organization, We are Más, partnered in an innovative real-time project to assess and respond to community information needs in South Florida. Called The Information Project — Rapid Response, the initiative identified 25 "Information Navigators" who were deeply embedded in their communities. Every week these navigators received a short four-question survey, designed to encourage participants to explain the issues, questions and rumors circulating in their community that week. Shortly afterward the navigators received bite-sized responses, designed to help them answer these questions and concerns, either in conversations or via WhatsApp or other social networks.

Over the period of the project, we received 544 questions, concerns and rumors from the weekly surveys, and the project created 109 communication assets, addressing 30 distinct questions (or groups of questions on the same topics) and responding to five major rumors. All the questions were addressed in English and Spanish. Question topics ranged from health, climate, safety and politics to crime, the economy and international events.

Key findings from the project include:

→ Trusted messengers are ready to engage more deeply with activities to understand and address information needs in their communities.

→ There are many, many questions and information needs in communities.

→ It's about so much more than facts.

→ Florida's diaspora communities are in dire need of quality information.

→ In diaspora communities, information moves between countries and contexts all the time.

→ Active voter suppression campaigns may already be underway in South Florida.

→ Journalists and fact checkers can benefit greatly from deep hyperlocal listening to the community, not just scanning social media.

→ Information must lead with empathy.

→ Journalistic skills remain essential to meeting information needs in real time.

→ Quality information must be versatile.

Overall, feedback and support for the program were overwhelmingly positive, as participants described new ways of thinking about information in their community and about their or their organization's understanding of the community. Notably, 78 percent of respondents said the information assets provided to them were more culturally appropriate than what is available via other sources. In addition, 78 percent of respondents agreed that the information assets helped them better communicate with their community about the covered topic.

Information Navigators described a direct result of their participation as being "much more confident" in their ability to recognize information needs in their community, some going as far as to say that they are now "very" or "extremely" confident thanks to being "more in tune with the needs of the people we serve" and having "[received] the information provided by [the program] from experts in the areas." Many also said their personal information habits are changing, in that they will "make sure to research the sources" and "investigate a little more" before sharing content. They learned that being more attentive and verifying information are important aspects of contributing to healthy information spaces.

As we head into a polarizing presidential election, this project has highlighted the urgent need to flip the default model for thinking about information environments. To strengthen our information environments, we need to work closely with hyperlocal communities, emphasize interventions that support people in accessing the information they need, when they need it, in the languages, cultural representation and formats that make sense for them, from the people they trust the most.

Introduction

Contemporary information ecosystems and the content they deliver are increasingly hard to navigate, no matter a person's educational level or background. Outdated communication practices, misleading information and falsehoods, information deficits, paywalls and other barriers make it difficult for many to find and discern evidence-based, trusted information for decision making. These trends will worsen in 2024, as election years are known to elevate foreign and domestic disinformation efforts and the monetization of misleading content. Advancements in artificial Intelligence pose new challenges such as sophisticated deepfakes and the automation of high volumes of misleading information targeting vulnerable audiences. In this landscape, local organizations and community leaders have emerged as key arbiters of trustworthy information, playing an essential role alongside journalists, libraries and official communication from authorities in helping people make sense of a rapidly changing world.

Trusted messengers, however, often aren't trained in navigating low-trust information environments, how to read evidence, or how to communicate complex issues.

In a groundbreaking new program called **The Information Project**, the Information Futures Lab (IFL) at Brown University collaborates with community organizations to:

1. Identify on a weekly basis pressing questions and concerns circulating in specific communities.
2. Equip trusted messengers with compassionate, accurate, short-format content that can be easily shared where their communities access information, such as WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook groups.

Throughout 2023, the IFL piloted **The Information Project (TIP)** in Rhode Island, training students in innovative methodologies to identify questions people are asking and compare those with available information shared by local government agencies, newsrooms and community organizations, and to partner with these sources of information on bridging information gaps.

In November/December 2023, the Information Futures Lab piloted a "rapid response" iteration of this approach in South Florida, aimed at supporting Spanish-speaking diaspora communities that are heavily targeted with misleading information and often lack access to credible information. In collaboration with a community partner, We are Más, the IFL worked directly with 25 trusted messengers to identify community members' questions and concerns, and to produce accessible, culturally competent answers on a weekly basis.

This report provides an initial read-out from this South Florida pilot, summarizing the TIP Rapid Response model, including the project design, the data collected, major observations, measured outcomes and lessons learned.

Key findings include that the TIP Rapid Response South Florida program was effective at soliciting information needs from communities, in building capacity and confidence in trusted messengers in Hispanic communities, and at delivering accurate, shareable, culturally competent content to the closed spaces where many community members get their information.

The program also delivered striking evidence on the significant discrepancies between people's questions and concerns and the information that is available to them in languages they speak, in the places they look for information, by people they trust, in ways that help them access essential services, participate in civic society, and make sense of the world.

The South Florida pilot demonstrated that The Information Project — Rapid Response is an effective new way for universities, community organizations and trusted messengers to collaborate on bridging such gaps, meeting people's information needs, and strengthening local information ecosystems.

The pilot project was made possible with generous funding from the Miami Foundation. The IFL is currently seeking funding to expand The Information Project — Rapid Response to 10 locations across the United States in an effort to address the questions and concerns of people who are often targeted by misleading information on a regular basis in the buildup to and aftermath of the 2024 election.

ABOUT THE INFORMATION FUTURES LAB

Founded in 2022, the Information Futures Lab (IFL) is a new type of university hub. Students and researchers work alongside community organizations, journalists, civic society leaders, and other sources of trusted information to envision a better future for our information spaces. Together, we improve local information ecosystems and support diverse populations in effectively accessing, creating, and making sense of information that is crucial to their well-being.

ABOUT WE ARE MÁS

We are Más (WAM) is a South Florida-based social impact organization specializing in culturally competent, hyperlocal engagement with diaspora groups in Hispanic, English- and Spanish-speaking communities. Working with a variety of purpose-driven organizations across the public, private and third sectors, including academic institutions, We are Más combines listening and an active local presence with research and strategic communications to support partners in connecting deeply with communities in diverse places such as South Florida, Texas and other Hispanic communities across the U.S.

Understanding the Landscape: The information crisis, community listening, and the information needs of diaspora communities

Advances in digital media make it possible for people around the world to seek information in online spaces through search engines, social media platforms and, increasingly, AI-driven chatbots. During emergencies, people search for urgent information about how to stay safe during unusual weather events or health crises. At other times, people search for how to manage new life events such as a diagnosis, a move to a new community, or simply to answer questions occurring in day-to-day life. An emerging body of research shows, however, that the information people need to make the best decisions for themselves, their families and their communities is increasingly difficult to find, access or trust in contemporary information ecosystems.[1,2]

Some of the barriers that prevent people from finding, accessing or trusting information include the absence of communication on the topic in question, or communication that:

→ lacks appropriate language and cultural cues.

→ is designed solely for high-speed, desktop access.

→ is behind a paywall.

→ is not available in the language spoken by the information seeker.

→ is not present in the places where key audiences spend their time consuming information.

→ is not designed for audiences with varying levels of digital and media literacy.

→ is only available unreliably/some of the time, such as overwhelmed crisis hotlines, weakening trust in the source.

→ is delivered by messengers that people trust only a little or not at all.

→ is produced with the deliberate intent to mislead or disinform people, weakening trust in accurate information.

→ is easily weaponized by bad actors whose aim is to design and spread false and misleading content within communities.

ONGOING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS INFORMATION CHALLENGES

Many solutions to such information challenges have been tried in recent years, including media literacy education, large-scale public information campaigns, and investments in improving how and where key institutions share information — from U.S. government agencies to major medical organizations to experts and scientists. Interventions that have been designed to try to prevent or correct the effects of poorly designed communication campaigns, misinformation, and weaponized information campaigns include visual markers to consider the accuracy of content, debunks of false or misleading information, and peer-to-peer user corrections.[3]

1. Broniatowski, D. A., Jamison, A. M., Qi, S., AlKulaib, L., Chen, T., Benton, A., Quinn, S. C., & Dredze, M. (2018). Weaponized Health Communication: Twitter Bots and Russian Trolls Amplify the Vaccine Debate. *American Journal of Public Health*, 108(10), 1378–1384. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304567

2. Mejova, Y., Gracyk, T., & Robertson, R. E. (2022). Googling for Abortion: Search Engine Mediation of Abortion Accessibility in the United States. *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media, 2*. https://doi.org/10.51685/jqd.2022.007

3. Smith, R. C., Kung; Winner, Daisy; Friedhoff, Stefanie; Wardle, Claire. (2023). A Systematic Review Of COVID-19 Misinformation Interventions: Lessons Learned. Health Affairs, 42(12), 1738–1746. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2023.00717

At the same time, as media gatekeeping has devolved and information sources have multiplied and diversified, information seekers today attempt to qualify information through new or more varied means of authority. In this environment, trusted members of communities — such as staff at civil society organizations, religious and cultural leaders, medical professionals, and some content creators on social media — have emerged as key partners to people who are seeking to obtain, verify and make sense of information. Supporting, funding and building capacity in trusted messengers is becoming an important component of efforts to address information challenges and meet people's information needs.[4,5,6]

LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY AND WORKING WITH TRUSTED MESSENGERS

In April 2008, the Knight Foundation and the Aspen Institute formed the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. As stated in the promotional materials, "The purpose of the Commission was to examine the information needs of American communities in the digital age and to suggest recommendations to strengthen the free flow of information."[7] Since the publication of the report, a number of resources and toolkits have been produced to help communities think about ways to assess community information[8] and news[9] ecosystems.

Some of the most important domestic work in this area has been led by the Listening Post Collective, supported by Internews.[10] Providing a framework for carrying out Information Needs Assessments, a number of different information environments have been assessed and interventions designed. One relevant example is the Information Needs Assessment carried out by Madeleine Bair with Hispanic communities in Oakland, California. Her report, Más Información,[11] demonstrated a real need for additional, Spanish, culturally relevant information, resulting in her establishing El Tímpano, a news site designed specifically for Spanish-speaking communities in the Bay Area. More recently Lam Thuy Vo, (a Fellow at our Lab in spring 2023) explored the Community Information Needs of Vietnamese elders in Oakland, finding an overreliance on YouTube as a source of information, despite the fact that many of the channels community members were watching were full of disinformation and conspiracy theories.[12]

4. Chau, M. M., Ahmed, N., Pillai, S., Telzak, R., Fraser, M., & Islam, N. S. (2023). Community-Based Organizations as Trusted Messengers in Health. Hastings Center Report, 53, S91-S98.

5. Ad Council Research Institute. (2022). Who Do We Trust With Our Lives: The Messenger Study. https://www.adcouncil.org/learn-with-us/ad-council-research-institute/2022-trusted-messengers-study

6. Friedhoff, S., Winner, D., et. al. (2022). *Infrastructures of Trust: The Case for Investing in Vaccine Demand*. https://buildingvaccinedemand.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-vaccine-demand.pdf

7. Knight Foundation and Aspen Institute (2009) Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age. https://knightfoundation.org/reports/informing-communities-sustaining-democracy-digital/

8. Harwood, R. (2011) Assessing Community Information Needs: A White Paper on Implementing the Recommendations of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. Knight Foundation. https://knightfoundation.org/reports/assessing-community-information-needs/

9. Morgan, F. (2021) A Guide to Assessing Local News Ecosystems. Democracy Fund

10. Internews works closely with humanitarian organizations globally to strengthen information environments, particularly in crisis situations. https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/resources/Internews_Mapping_Information_Ecosystems_2015.pdf

11. Bair, M. (2017) Más Información. https://internews.org/resource/mas-informacion/

12. Thuy Vo, L. (2023) Vietnamese YouTuber Is Filling Information Voids with Newsmax and Breitbart. The MarkUp. https://themarkup.org/languages-of-misinformation/2023/06/09/vietnamese-youtuber-is-filling-information-voids-with-newsmax-and-breitbart

In public health specifically, different efforts have been developed in recent years to better understand and respond to emerging information needs. One is iHeard, a community-level misinformation surveillance and response system based in St Louis, Missouri. Every week, a dashboard is updated, whereby it is possible to see the top "concerns" from the community (sourced from around 214 participants in the city), and short responses to those concerns.[13]

During the pandemic, amid growing concerns about vaccine demand, different initiatives attempted to capture and understand community questions and respond effectively. One was the Equity First Vaccine Initiative (the authors were co-leads on the project), which worked closely with community-based organizations in five US cities. The project report highlights the lessons learned about the need for deep partnership with community groups and the power of trusted messengers.[14] At the same time, the CDC piloted its Vaccine Confidence reports.[15] During the height of the pandemic, the reports were biweekly and were based on a mixed methodology that included calls to the CDC Tipline, social media listening, and reports from departments of health.

While research on trusted messengers is relatively limited, research by the Ad Council in 2022 highlighted that "the closer a person is to one's inner circle, the more that person is generally trusted for information and decision making."[16] Journalists often cite the power of online influencers to shift attitudes or behaviors.[17] However, the important role of those deeply embedded in their communities to help others navigate the overwhelming and increasingly polluted information environment is becoming clearer. More research is needed, but our project provides additional support for this idea.

INFORMATION NEEDS IN SOUTH FLORIDA DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

FLORIDA'S DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

Florida has the third-largest Hispanic population in the United States, after California and Texas. More than 27 percent of Florida's population is of Hispanic origin, and more than one in five Florida residents statewide is a recent immigrant.[18] The state is home to the largest Cuban (1.5 million), Puerto Rican (1.2 million) and Colombian (403,567) populations in the nation, with the top countries of origin for immigrants being Cuba (23% of immigrants), Haiti (8%), Colombia (6%), Mexico (6%), and Jamaica (5%).[19]

A majority of Florida's Hispanic populations reside in South Florida, an area made up of diaspora communities including Cuban, Colombian, Haitian, Jamaican, Puerto Rican, Nicaraguan, Venezuelan, and many others. Members of these communities represent multiple generations of immigration and are often part of families that belong to multiple diaspora groups.

13. Johnson, K. et al (2023) iHeard STL: Development and first year findings from a local surveillance and rapid response system for addressing COVID-19 and other health misinformation. Plos One. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293288

14. Friedhoff, S. et al (2023) Infrastructures of Trust. The Case for Investing in Vaccine Demand. Information Futures Lab. Brown University.

15. CDC. Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/vaccinate-with-confidence.html

16. Ad Council. (2022) 2022 Trusted Messengers Study. https://www.adcouncil.org/learn-with-us/ad-council-research-institute/2022-trusted-messengers-study

17. Lorenz, T. (2021) To Fight Vaccine Lies, Authorities Recruit an 'Influencer Army', New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/01/technology/vaccine-lies-influencer-army.html

18. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/09/2020-census-dhc-a-hispanic-population.html

19. American Immigration Council. Fact Sheet: Immigrants in Florida https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-florida

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AMONG THE HISPANIC POPULATION IN MIAMI-FT LAUDERDALE-WEST PALM BEACH METROPOLITAN AREAS (PEW RESEARCH, 2021)[20]:

Origin	Percent of Hispanics
Cuban American	40%
Colombian origin	9%
Puerto Rican origin	9%
Mexican origin	6%
Venezuelan origin	6%
Other Hispanic groups	29%

A 2013 Pew Hispanic Report revealed that Miami is a majority Latino city — 70 percent of its population is Hispanic. Miami also has a high share of foreign-born Hispanics compared to many other metro areas — 66 percent of Miami's Latinos are foreign born. 58 percent of all City of Miami residents, of any origin, are also foreign born, according to the latest Census data.[21]

FLORIDA DIASPORA COMMUNITIES AND ONLINE INFORMATION

Since the emergence of internet communication, diaspora communities have utilized online technologies to maintain or create new communities that transform geographic boundaries.[22] Whether it be to explore cultural heritage,[23] health information,[24] or civic information,[25] they seek information from an increasing number of online sources, especially when faced with information overload[26] or in the absence of other trusted authorities.[27] Overall, diaspora communities utilize social media as much as other American communities, but Hispanic populations favor different platforms, particularly WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook.[28]

20. Moslimani, M. (2023, August 16). 11 facts about Hispanic origin groups in the U.S. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/08/16/11-facts-about-hispanic-origin-groups-in-the-us/

21. United States Government. (n.d.). U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: Miami City, Florida; Miami-Dade County ... U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts Miami city, Florida; Miami-Dade County, Florida. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/miamicityflorida,miamidadecountyflorida/PST045222

22. Parham, A.A. (2005). Internet, Place, and Public Sphere in Diaspora Communities. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 14(2), 349-380. https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.0.0020.

23. Erika T. Weir (2019) Exploring the Digital Information Needs of Diaspora Communities: A User Study of the Lithuanian Diaspora, Slavic & East European Information Resources, 20:1-2, 39-49, DOI: 10.1080/15228886.2019.1628501

24. Hasan, M., Singh, H., & Haffizulla, F. (2021). Culturally sensitive health education in the Caribbean diaspora: a scoping review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(4), 1476.

25. Adams Parham, A. (2005). Internet, Place, and Public Sphere in Diaspora Communities. Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, 14(Fall/Winter), 349-380. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.0.0020

26. Ndumu, A. (2020). Toward a new understanding of immigrant information behavior: A survey study on information access and information overload among US Black diasporic immigrants. Journal of Documentation, 76(4), 869-891.

27. Vo, L. T. (2023). How Citizen is trying to remake itself by recruiting elderly Asians. MIT Technology Review. Retrieved January 12, 2023, from https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/02/20/1068845/citizen-crime-tracking-app-bay-area-asian-community/

28. Auxier, B and M. Anderson (April 2021) Social Media Use in 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2021/04/PI_2021.04.07_Social-Media-Use_FINAL.pdf

These overall trends are confirmed by the 2022 Florida International University South Florida Cuba Poll, for example, showing that "approximately 37% of the entire sample […] received their information about Cuba from social media sources." There were clear generational and migration wave differences: While only 4 percent of the oldest respondents reported receiving information about Cuba from social media sources, 54 percent of the youngest respondents do, and about 19 percent of the entire sample reported that popular content creators on social media influence their political attitudes to some degree.

FLORIDA DIASPORA COMMUNITIES AND DISINFORMATION

Hispanic communities are often directly targeted with misleading and false information in the buildup to elections. While 74 percent of Hispanic voters in Florida got election information from YouTube during the 2020 presidential election,[29] a report from the watchdog group Media Matters found 40 Spanish-language videos on YouTube during that time that advanced misinformation about U.S. elections, including the false notion that fraudulent ballots were coming into the United States from China and Mexico.[30]

Disinformation originates from many sources, including domestic and foreign media. Alethea Group, which helps corporations guard against disinformation, in the buildup to the 2020 election looked at seven YouTube channels that were based in Colombia but appeared to target conservative Spanish speakers living in or tied to the US. The channels often took false or misleading narratives from foreign state and domestic media organizations, repeated them on YouTube in Spanish, and then sometimes pointed viewers to platforms such as Twitter and Telegram, where the translated content continued to spread.

Also in 2020, Politico reported how "WhatsApp groups dedicated to updates on the pandemic and news for the Colombian and Venezuelan communities became intermittently interspersed with conspiracy theories from videos of far-right commentators or news clips from new Spanish-language sites, like Noticias 24 and PanAm Post, and the YouTube-based Informativo G24 website".[31]

A lack of access to platform data has stymied research on the impact of disinformation on political attitudes and voter behavior. However, researchers at The University of Texas at Austin, for example, conducted research in two U.S. cities with large Hispanic and Latino populations — Miami and San Antonio — and found that misinformation shared via WhatsApp "... not only spreads but changes people's opinions on political issues by leveraging trusted relationships."[32] Similarly, a 2021 survey of Cuban American voters in Florida found that 40 percent did not accept the legitimacy of the 2020 U.S. election result.[33]

29. Contreras, R. (2021, April 15). GOP used YouTube to win Latino voters who Democrats ignored. https://www.axios.com/2021/04/15/republicans-youtube-latino-voters-democrats-trump

30. Hsu, T. (Oct 12, 2022) Misinformation Swirls in Non-English Languages Ahead of Midterms. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/12/business/media/midterms-foreign-language-misinformation.html

31. Rodriguez, C. and M. Caputo (Sept 14, 2020) 'This is f---ing crazy': Florida Latinos swamped by wild conspiracy theories. Politico. https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/14/florida-latinos-disinformation-413923

32. Mimizuka, K., & Trauthig, I. (2023, October 24). WhatsApp, misinformation, and Latino political discourse in the U.S. Tech Policy Press. https://www.techpolicy.press/whatsapp-misinformation-and-latino-political-discourse-in-the-u-s/

33. Bendixen and Amandi International (March 2021) Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters. https://www.politico.com/states/f/?id=00000178-387f-dc18-af7d-fc7f84040000

THE POWER OF CLOSED MESSAGING APPS

Given South Florida's melting pot of communities, cultures, traditions, languages and dialects, there is no one-message, one-language, or one-dialect-fits-all approach to effective communication. But there is one aspect of communication most communities in South Florida have in common: along with other diaspora communities in the U.S. they use closed messaging platforms, particularly WhatsApp, more frequently than other populations. Hispanic Americans (46 percent) are far more likely to say they use WhatsApp than Black (23 percent) or white Americans (16 percent), according to a 2021 Pew report.[34]

WhatsApp, then, is also a key platform where diaspora communities are targeted with misleading and false information.[35] Because WhatsApp messages are encrypted, it is hard to trace the origins of stories shared by users. This creates unique pathways for actors outside the United States to feed inaccurate or deliberately misleading information into the country, often by spreading the information in the country of origin, from which it is shared with relatives and friends in the U.S. via WhatsApp messages.[36]

The Information Project Rapid Response: Design and Execution

We designed The Information Project building on the essential role that trusted messengers, listening to the community and accessible information play in efforts to mitigate information challenges and meet the information needs of diverse populations.

Working with 25 trusted messengers in South Florida — we call them Information Navigators — the rapid response pilot had two main elements:

1. Through a phone-accessible interface, Information Navigators every week provided insights on questions and concerns they noticed in the community, and

2. via WhatsApp and email, Information Navigators received brief, accurate, engaging responses to those questions and concerns every week, allowing Navigators to share the information and be better equipped to discuss questions, concerns and rumors with their communities.

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION NAVIGATORS

Information Navigators are people deeply embedded in their communities who have both an ongoing understanding of information needs and the networks and authority to help meet them. Many of the 25 Information Navigators we identified in South Florida were community leaders from organizations such as YWCA, Hispanic Unity of Florida, Mujeres Latinas Empowering Women, United Way of Broward County and the Maurice Ferré Institute at FIU. We also included representatives of more informal community information spaces, such as a schoolteacher, a pro-bono lawyer, a construction company owner who works with undocumented migrants, and a youth leader.

Together, the selected Information Navigators tell a story of the area and South Florida diaspora communities. The group comprised Hispanics from different religious backgrounds, political ideologies and professions, including journalists originally from Puerto Rico and Venezuela. It included a recognized Cuban-American nonprofit leader known for her years of

34. Auxier, B and M. Anderson (April 2021) Social Media Use in 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2021/04/PI_2021.04.07_Social-Media-Use_FINAL.pdf

35. Trauthig, I. (2024). Diaspora Communities and Computational Propaganda on Messaging Apps (183). https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/PB_no.183.pdf

36. Martin, M. (2020, October 24). A bilingual tool that fights misinformation on WhatsApp. NPR. https://www.npr.org/2020/10/24/927487143/a-bilingual-tool-that-fights-misinformation-on-whatsapp

advocacy with Hispanic women and children in the area; a public information officer from an elections office in Florida who engages with bilingual media; and a Colombian hair stylist who works 12-hour days and had previously helped We Are Más research private QAnon Telegram channels in Spanish based on invites she was receiving from her clients. A key goal was to combine U.S.-born Hispanics/Latinos with foreign-born Hispanics who are still connected to family and friends in their country of origin.

Taken together, the participating Information Navigators represented many communities:

Self-reported communities of representation among Information Navigators in South Florida.

GETTING STARTED

As a way to build trust between Information Navigators and the project team, as well as provide an opportunity to discuss the project objectives and design, we hosted a kickoff event in Miami in early November. The event was key to communicating and culturally translating important project details in person in English and Spanish, and to walking participants through, for example, the purpose of the weekly survey, and how to access and complete it. The event allowed us to learn from the deep understanding participants had of their communities, and the deep commitment they brought to becoming a part of the solution to information challenges, informing many decisions throughout the pilot. It also allowed us to understand the varying levels of technological and media literacy among Information Navigators, helping us calibrate our support infrastructure and capacity building starting points.
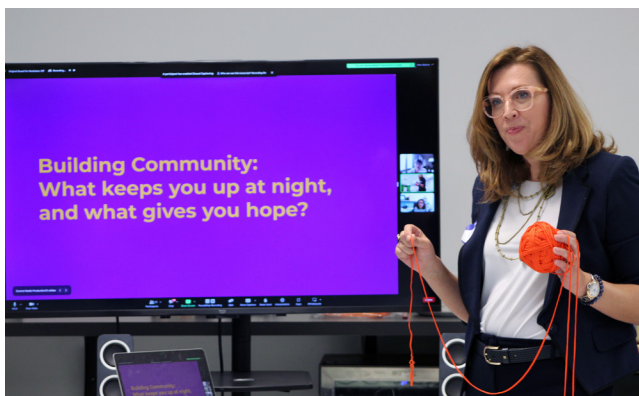
Project partner Evelyn Pérez-Verdía of We Are Más explains an activity that encourages participants to share reflections about their community's experiences.
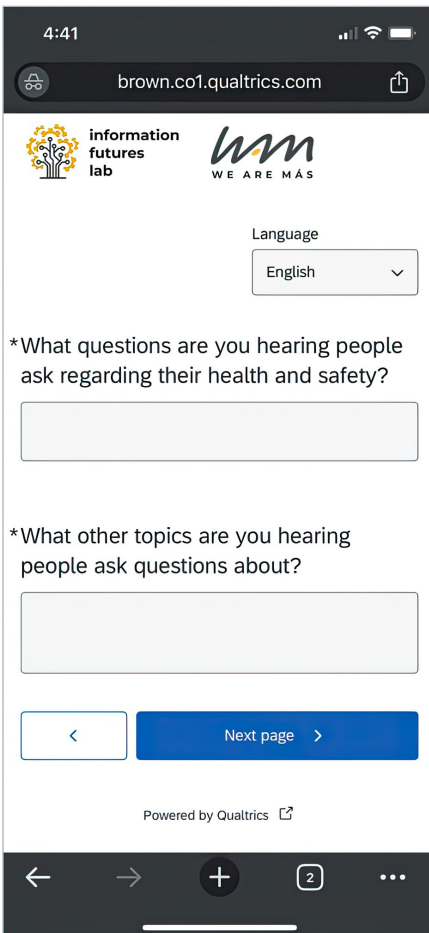
At the program kickoff, Information Navigators discuss concerns about information in their communities.

Information Navigators and project team at the kickoff event.

THE WEEKLY SURVEY: COLLECTING THE QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The 25 Information Navigators completed weekly short surveys (in either English or Spanish, based on their preference) which asked four questions:

1. What questions are you hearing people ask regarding their health and safety?
2. What other topics are you hearing people ask questions about?
3. What rumors are people sharing about health and safety? Do you know who or what is the source of these rumors?
4. What rumors are people sharing about other topics? Do you know who or what is the source of these rumors?

The participants were paid a small stipend for completing the survey. Participants were told they would receive payment even if they had no "new" issues or concerns to share (it turned out there was no shortage of items to report either way.)

Every week, the team at the Information Futures Lab and We Are Más translated and coded survey responses for categories of information submitted, such as politics, healthcare, personal health, or climate. The top 3-5 questions, concerns or rumors were identified as ones that would be the focus of responses for that week.

The production of the weekly response products involved several steps:

1. **Researching accurate, contextual, local answers** to the submitted questions and concerns. This included rapid scans of relevant scientific and gray literature, as well as phone calls and interviews if necessary, such as to verify eligibility criteria for a number of health services for the uninsured or underinsured.

2. **Consulting subject matter experts** (for example, local physicians, academics and climate experts) on the questions relevant to their expertise, or to their knowledge as community members. This was facilitated through asynchronous work in a collaborative document, where experts could also engage with each other on scientific and other details.

3. **Turning the knowledge gained through these evidence and contextual reviews into brief, engaging messages,** applying journalistic, communications and behavioral science best practices — such as verifying all claims, using plain language and starting every message with empathy, not facts.

4. **Checking messages for cultural competencies,** including avoiding words or images that have a different meaning in another culture and omitting links to websites that are paywalled, not available in Spanish, or from a source not trusted by the community.

5. **Translating all messages into Spanish.**

6. **Sharing the brief messages with Information Navigators** via WhatsApp, for easy forwarding in the app, as well as in a newsletter, for copy & pasting into Facebook and other platforms.

7. **Assessing which messages should be turned into other formats,** such as audio clips, and/or brief social media videos. Initially, responses were shared as text only, featuring emojis for a more engaging presentation. Starting in week 3, some responses were produced as short social media clips and audio clips in both Spanish and English.
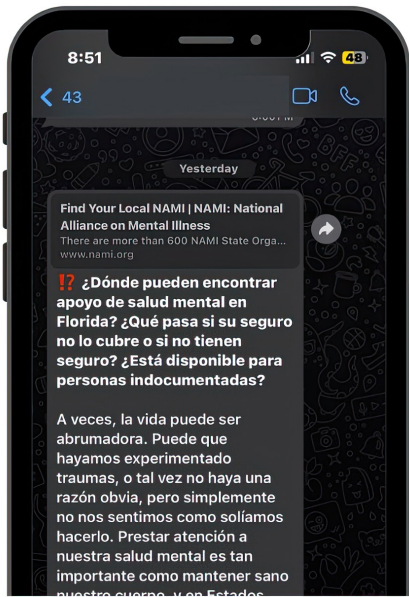
Examples of social media-ready content shared with Information Navigators during the pilot.

Upon assessment of questions and concerns submitted during the first week, the team selected a format for the weekly read-outs for Information Navigators: Each week, they would receive 3-5 questions & answers, one **Tip Of The Week** and one **Rumor Of The Week**. This decision was based on overall team capacity as well as considerations of how much information the Navigators would be able to receive in a given week (additional reflections on the Navigators' capacity to receive and share information is available in the discussion section.)

WRAP-UP EVENT

To discuss experiences, observations and reflections with all participants and collectively make sense of what we learned, the project team hosted a closing event in Miami during the final week of the pilot. At the event, Information Navigators and experts shared insights, feedback and reflections, and participated in a rapid poll assessing some of the impact the project has had on Information Navigators and their communities.

POST-PROJECT SURVEY

In the days following the wrap-up event, the Information Navigators were asked to complete an anonymous survey about their experience with the project.

Project and Outcome Data: Mapping the information experiences of Hispanic Spanish-speaking communities in South Florida

DATA ON QUESTIONS, CONCERNS AND RUMORS

In total, over six weeks, there were 544 entries comprising questions, concerns and rumors shared by Information Navigators. Some entries from different navigators could be essentially the same or similar enough to be grouped into one set of questions or one rumor.

Upon closer analysis and discussion, we categorized the questions shared by Information Navigators into three groups:
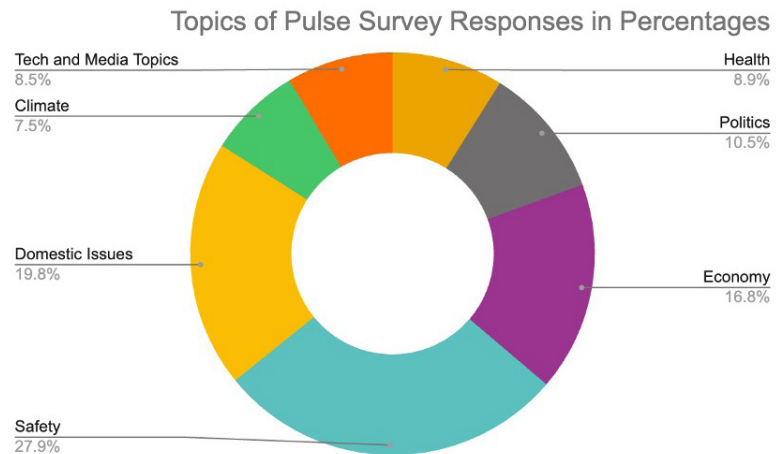
→ **Group 1** comprised questions that had straightforward answers and where we served as a bridge to those answers, such as "How do I get a mammogram in South Florida if I am underinsured?" or "Is it true plastics are now in the clouds?" or "Do I need the shingles vaccine?"

→ **Group 2** comprised questions that needed a mix of evidence and contextual understanding, such as "¿Pierdo mi casa por no poder asegurarla?" ("Do I lose my home because I can't insure it?"). This particular question speaks to a number of issues residents of South Florida face, from the impact of climate change on insurance availability and rates to the complexity of navigating the insurance industry at a time when people are worried about the costs of basic needs.

→ **Group 3** comprised questions that were indications of how people feel about the world around them, and what keeps them up at night, such as "Are Jews still safe in the U.S.?" and "Is it true that democracy in the U.S. is in danger?" and "Are schools even safe anymore?" Instead of attempting to answer such questions, our approach was to train Information Navigators in facilitating conversations about such issues, and directing people to resources and places where they can find community, conversation and support.

Responses were coded into a list of categories that emerged and evolved throughout the coding process, in close collaboration between the WAM and IFL teams. Topics represented in the entries varied and were categorized into 19 topics (See Table 1 in the Appendix), which often coincided with current events. For example, on Dec. 15, information about a cantaloupe salmonella contamination began to enter news headlines. For the next two weeks, Information Navigators submitted corresponding information needs: questions like "Salmonella outbreak in different food sources. How to know what is safe," and rumors like, "shouldn't eat any fish because [of the] salmonella outbreak."

Generally, the 19 topics fall within seven overarching themes (see Table 3 for full list of themed topics.) Top information needs were about:

→ Safety (27.9%)

→ Economy (16.8%),

→ Domestic Issues (19.8%)

Topics of Pulse Survey Responses in Percentages

- Tech and Media Topics 8.5%
- Climate 7.5%
- Domestic Issues 19.8%
- Safety 27.9%
- Health 8.9%
- Politics 10.5%
- Economy 16.8%

PERCENTAGES OF THEMES REPRESENTED IN PULSE SURVEY ENTRIES.

The questions, concerns and rumors covered a wide range of issues, even within topic areas. For example, economic questions ranged from affordability of housing, food and holiday presents to how the housing insurance market or inflation works. Health questions ranged from where to get a mammogram to how to sign up for affordable healthcare to how to get care when uninsured and/or undocumented to a plethora of questions and rumors related to vaccines broadly (not just Covid-19 vaccines.) People expressed concerns about safety issues as diverse as a new permitless carry law, mental health and school shootings, or the influence of immigration on neighborhood safety.

DATA ON WEEKLY INFORMATION ASSETS SHARED WITH INFORMATION NAVIGATORS

From the 544 questions and rumors submitted via the weekly survey, the Information Futures Lab and We Are Más co-created 109 communications assets. Where survey entries were similar, they were grouped into one set of questions or one rumor to be responded to or one tip to be shared. Questions and rumors to respond to were selected based on several factors:

1. frequency of the topic and the specific line of questioning.

2. "Answerability" — we only responded to questions in group 1 or 2, per the categorization above.

3. considerations of feasibility within the constraints of the pilot, such as time and formats. For example, the weekly survey picked up consistent concerns about gun safety both in schools and neighborhoods. While we talked to several local and national experts in exploring how to best respond, we decided that our brief WhatsApp format and short time frame did not allow for an adequate, trustworthy response. We considered hosting a podcast conversation, but production and promotion of the content were beyond what was feasible.

Responses were initially sent to the Information Navigators in one package, a few days after the survey responses were submitted, via both WhatsApp and a newsletter in English and Spanish. Based on feedback from Information Navigators, we later switched to sharing one or two information assets per day during the week, to make consumption and sharing more manageable. Information Navigators also asked for information to be shared in audio and video formats, which prompted production of such assets in later weeks.

RAPID RESPONSE INFORMATION ASSETS AT A GLANCE:

→ 70 unique WhatsApp text messages, on average 200-400 words (35 in Spanish and 35 in English)

→ Shortest message: 60 words (answering the question "Where can I get a free Covid-19 vaccine?")

→ Longest message: 649 words (answering two questions: "What if I get sick and have no health insurance?" and "If I am undocumented, can I get medical attention without getting in trouble?")

→ 10 Mailchimp newsletters, with opening rates between 55 and 61 percent (five in Spanish and five in English)

→ 16 audio messages (eight in Spanish and eight in English)

→ 13 video/carousel messages (more in Spanish than English)

→ **109 total communications assets shared with Information Navigators**

DATA ON PROJECT EXECUTION AND IMPACT

The Information Navigators shared specific feedback at the wrap-up event and in the post-project survey. Here is a summary of key outcomes:

Weekly Pulse Survey:

→ Most participants agreed that the weekly Pulse Survey, hosted on Qualtrics and available in both English and Spanish, was easy or very easy for them to complete. No participants reported any issues or barriers in submitting their answers.

→ Preference for how often to submit entries into the Pulse Survey were split between those who would prefer to submit on a regularly scheduled basis, 60 percent, and those who would prefer to submit only when they identified a new information need in their community, 40 percent. Regardless, Information Navigators agreed that reminders to complete the survey are helpful.

Information assets:

→ Information Navigators' preferred way to receive messages back was via WhatsApp, followed by video clips, then email responses, then audio responses.

→ Half of respondents said it was more helpful to receive a weekly digest of insights, while the other half was split evenly between preferring daily snippets and having no preference.

→ 83 percent of respondents said they felt comfortable forwarding the information insights directly to people they know.

→ 78 percent of respondents said the information assets provided to them were more culturally appropriate than what is available via other sources.

→ 78 percent of respondents agreed that the information assets helped them better communicate with their community about the covered topic.
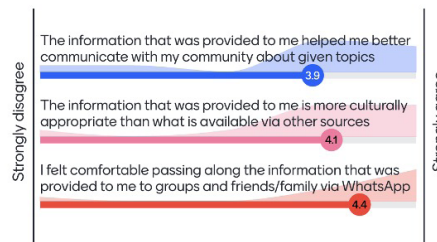
Impact of the program on the Information Navigator's role and relationship with information:

→ Information Navigators described a direct result of their participation as being "much more confident" in their ability to recognize information needs in their community, some going as far as to say that they are now "very" or "extremely" confident thanks to being "more in tune with the needs of the people we serve" and having "[received] the information provided by you from experts in the areas."

→ Many also said their own personal information habits are changing, in that they will "make sure to research the sources" and "investigate a little more" before sharing content. They learned that being more attentive and verifying information are important aspects of contributing to healthy information spaces.

Feedback the Information Navigators received from their communities:

→ "They were really surprised, 'Wow somebody heard me and they're bringing that info back to me.' We realized more and more our senior population is being left behind because they can't keep up with it in terms of media."

→ "I'm from Venezuela, and for example shared it with my family, and they were grateful to receive it and get that kind of information because they didn't have it."

How much do you agree with these statements:

Information Navigators expressed confidence in the program's contributions to their confidence and to the body of information available to their community.

Generally, feedback and support for the program was overwhelmingly positive, as participants described new ways of thinking about information in their community and about their or their organization's understanding of the community.

Word cloud produced at the program wrap-up event in December 2023.

BROWN
School of Public Health

Discussion and Lessons Learned

In just six weeks, The Information Project — Rapid Response pilot raised a number of critical learnings for those who care about improving information ecosystems.

TRUSTED MESSENGERS ARE READY TO ENGAGE

While very different in key demographics such as income, political affiliation and education levels, all 25 Information Navigators expressed concern about the future for their children and loved ones — and all wanted to be part of a solution. Bringing trusted messengers together in real life is powerful and part of the solution to the information crisis. Working with trusted messengers to identify and respond to timely, local, community-based information needs provides untapped opportunities to feed accessible, bite-sized, quality information into closed social media spaces where many people are receiving their information and making sense of the world.

THERE ARE MANY, MANY QUESTIONS

The questions and concerns Information Navigators shared every week were surprising for three reasons:

1. The number of questions, concerns and rumors that were submitted. Some information navigators would add 5-8 questions and concerns instead of the anticipated 2-4 (per week).
2. The diversity of questions shared by the Information Navigators, from health to the economy, the election, climate, safety and international relations.
3. Those rumors we thought had died are still very much on people's minds, for example, that vaccines include micro-chips or cause autism.

An unexpected challenge and learning was the extent to which some Information Navigators felt overwhelmed by the volume and diversity of questions they discovered as part of the project.

IT'S ABOUT SO MUCH MORE THAN FACTS

Initial coding of survey responses into categories of "general" and "individual" questions versus "speculative" questions allowed us to recognize that less than half of information needs were about straightforward facts. A number of survey responses were existential questions, such as "Are Jews safe in America?" and questions related to broader events and trends, such as "Should I send my children to school when shootings are such a threat?" and "Will there be a terrorist attack in the U.S. due to the Israel-Gaza war?" Because of the frequency of these types of submissions, we decided to start disseminating "tips of the week" that focused on how to have conversations with one another about difficult or controversial topics and how to engage in difficult conversations with empathy.

FLORIDA'S DIASPORA COMMUNITIES ARE IN DIRE NEED OF QUALITY INFORMATION

From social media to YouTube to Spanish radio, South Florida has become a hotspot for misleading and false information. Tamoa Calzadilla, managing editor at Factchequeado and one of our rapid response project's local experts, once said to the New York Times: "With mis- and disinformation in Spanish, we feel like we are fighting a giant."[37] As laid out earlier in this paper, Hispanic communities are often directly targeted with misleading and false information, especially in the buildup to important elections. The volume, diversity and closeness to current events we observed in questions asked during our pilot illustrate how Spanish-speaking communities in South Florida are especially in need of quality information in the language they are most comfortable with, shared in ways that are relevant to their lives.

> "I found the information you provided very helpful. We need to continue this work and expand it. A lot of us in the nonprofit sector need these tools so we can go and give feedback.
>
> A lot of what we hear is from immigrants who are new to the country and need help navigating things. No matter how long they are here, they still have questions; they don't know how the system works."
>
> → **Ana Valladares,** Information Navigator and CEO of the South Florida Non-Profit Organization Mujeres Latinas Empowering Women.

IN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES, INFORMATION MOVES BETWEEN COUNTRIES AND CONTEXTS ALL THE TIME

Every week as a new batch of questions arrived, we noticed questions directly related to international issues and domestic challenges in Information Navigators' countries of origin. Especially on WhatsApp, the feedback loop is constant, with information flowing in many ways across physical borders and information contexts. The ways in which disinformation travels across borders through diaspora communities has been documented, and our pilot also supported research showing how digital technology allows migrants to stay in constant communication with people in their country of origin on questions related to daily life.[38] For example, an Information Navigator particularly appreciated the shingles vaccine information as the information her community was receiving on the topic in Spanish from friends and family back home was confusing and misleading.

ACTIVE VOTER SUPPRESSION CAMPAIGNS MAY ALREADY BE UNDERWAY IN SOUTH FLORIDA

From questions and concerns being shared, it seems that in December 2023, an active voter suppression campaign was already underway, targeting Spanish-speaking communities in South Florida. Rumors were circulating that "the election in 2024 won't happen," that "elections…will be fraudulent," and that "Alexa says that there will be no election in 2024."

37. Hsu, T. (Oct 12, 2022) Misinformation Swirls in Non-English Languages Ahead of Midterms. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/12/business/media/midterms-foreign-language-misinformation.html

38. Kalantzi, F. (2021) The role of technology in the enhancement of diasporic networks. Routed. https://www.routedmagazine.com/technology-greek-diaspora-network

JOURNALISTS AND FACT CHECKERS CAN GREATLY BENEFIT FROM HYPERLOCAL SOCIAL LISTENING

Collecting key questions people are asking every week provides a great untapped source of information that journalists and fact checkers can refer to for compelling and real-time stories responding to information needs and concerns within diaspora communities. We, for example, observed consistent questions about various impacts of the climate crisis, from flooding protections to insurance troubles, and found little to no information in Spanish, at the appropriate cultural and climate literacy level, that wasn't paywalled and led with empathy. Another topic that emerged regularly was the Hamas — Israel war and how related domestic terrorism threats are viewed in Hispanic diaspora communities, where many have experiences with domestic terrorism and other forms of political violence. The local concerns related to the war were not a subject of much news coverage during the period of our pilot.

INFORMATION MUST LEAD WITH EMPATHY

Applying behavioral science best practices, we didn't answer questions such as "Do vaccines cause autism in babies?" with "NO, they don't" but rather with an emphatic "This is such a scary thought, isn't it?" Leading with empathy made the content less combative and more approachable. The project's fact-checking expert remarked that she is making changes at her organization based on this approach.

JOURNALISTIC SKILLS REMAIN ESSENTIAL TO MEETING INFORMATION NEEDS IN REAL TIME

We also found that journalistic skills in quickly researching, verifying, interpreting and contextualizing relevant information, as well as being able to present such information in brief and engaging prose and visuals, are essential to feeding quality information into closed online information on a timely basis.

QUALITY INFORMATION MUST BE VERSATILE

There is a need to create shareable content that works in different spaces, for different types of people, at different times. As discussed, the pilot iterated on different formats for sharing information assets with the Information Navigators, to get an understanding of which formats best meet their needs. Consistent with communications best practice, we learned that all of the formats we offered were beneficial to some and were utilized in different ways.

Conclusions

This project highlighted how many questions and concerns people have and the rumors they encounter every week. More importantly, this project highlighted the very real challenge people face in finding answers to these questions and concerns. The overabundance of information available via search engines, social media sites and increasingly AI-powered chatbots actually makes it much harder to find relevant, actionable information quickly from trusted sources.

Funded projects around the information environment too frequently focus on one topic — elections, climate or vaccines. This project demonstrated how these topics overlap, and how there is a critical need for us to zoom out to think about the information environments as a whole. Similarly, there is a disproportionate emphasis on identifying and tackling misinformation without understanding the ways that the absence of culturally relevant, location-specific, multilingual answers to questions can make people more susceptible to the "answers" being offered by disinformation actors or conspiracy theorists (who are much more sophisticated in listening to and responding to people's concerns and fears).

Participants in this project, from nonprofit leaders to informal community navigators, were beyond eager to participate, articulating their concern for the amount of confusing information that was circulating in their communities, and for the ability of communities to access quality information, and to come closer together instead of moving further apart. Attendance at both events was high despite travel, weather and other obstacles. Contributions and feedback throughout were exceptionally thoughtful, considerate and insightful. Without exception, we found community members wanting to be part of a solution to a challenge they felt keenly aware of but ill-equipped to resolve on their own. Already, several organizations that participated in the project are taking this lesson to heart and are planning to form a partnership to continue this work in some form, starting with deepening their connections and collaborating on what's missing and how to improve communications.

Over the past eight years, the focus on disinformation has led to increased funding for "social listening" projects that investigate rumors and falsehoods circulating online. But the deliverables for these projects are too often weekly reports describing the rumors, rather than an understanding of how the rumors might be affecting communities. More importantly, the disproportionate focus on disinformation means that research on what communities are actually confused or concerned about are almost nonexistent. And there is little attention paid to access to quality information and whether that is being shared by messengers trusted by different communities.

As we head into an exceptionally close, polarized election, this project has highlighted the urgent need to flip the default model for thinking about information environments. To strengthen our information environments, we need to work closely with hyperlocal communities, emphasize interventions that support people in accessing the information they need, when they need it, in the languages and formats that make sense for them, from the people they trust the most.

Acknowledgements

The learnings from this pilot project would not have been possible without the 25 Information Navigators, who committed to this program with passion, empathy, and deep care for their communities. We are grateful to all of them for taking the time each week to give thoughtful insight into their communities' information needs and for giving feedback about their experiences in the program, all of which will make its next iteration stronger.

Another group of participants greatly helped inform the program: Six experts from South Florida whose areas of specialization were relevant to the information needs of communities. Comprising doctors, academics, policy experts and fact checkers, this group of experts took time each week to review information needs and provide vital answers and data to inform the community. We thank our experts for their dedication to the project and willingness to share their knowledge.

Finally, The Information Futures Lab would like to thank the Miami Foundation for the financial support making this pilot project possible.

Appendix

TYPE OF INFORMATION NEED

PRIMARY TOPIC	Concern	Question	Rumor	Grand Total
Climate	5	4	2	11
Economy	49	26	8	83
Education	4	—	—	4
Firearms	9	4	3	16
Gender	1	1	2	4
Healthcare	32	40	7	79
Housing	6	6	3	15
Immigration	9	5	3	17
International	5	8	—	13
Media	4	—	1	5
Mental Health	8	2	1	11
Pandemic	3	6	10	19
Personal Health	13	13	8	35
Politics	38	18	26	82
Security	19	6	4	29
Technology	2	1	2	5
Vaccines	8	21	11	40
War	13	6	7	26
Weather/Storms/Heat	5	4	3	12
Grand Total	**233**	**171**	**101**	**506**

Table 1: Primary Topic Frequency by Type of Information Need

TYPE OF INFORMATION NEED

PRIMARY TOPIC	COUNTA of Primary Topic	COUNTA of Secondary Topic
Climate	11	1
Economy	83	22
Education	4	1
Firearms	16	8
Gender	4	4
Healthcare	79	22
Housing	15	5
Immigration	17	11
International	13	9
Media	5	3
Mental Health	11	3
Pandemic	19	7
Personal Health	35	6
Politics	82	25
Security	29	9
Technology	5	2
Vaccines	40	27
War	26	18
Weather/Storms/Heat	12	8
Grand Total	**506**	**191**
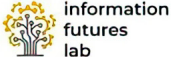
Table 2: Number of Responses by Primary and Secondary Topic

TYPE OF INFORMATION NEED

THEMED CATEGORIES	Number of Frequency	Primary Category Topics Included
Health	44	Healthcare; Mental Health; Pandemic; Personal Health; Vaccines
Politics	52	Politics; International
Economy	83	Economy
Safety	138	Firearms; War; Security
Domestic Issues	98	Housing, Education, Immigration
Climate	37	Climate; Weather/Storm
Tech and Media Topics	42	Media; Technology

Table 3: Themed Categories of Primary Information Topic

The Information Project

Dear Information Navigators,

Happy Monday! This week we will share a tip or question and response every day (instead of sending everything all at once.)

Let us know if that's useful!

Today's question is about -- microplastics!

As always, let us know how this is working and what else would be helpful!

Yours in community, 👫👫🟡
The We Are Más & Information Futures Lab teams

Are plastics getting into everything? Did they really find plastics in clouds? What does that mean, and what can we do about it?

🌱🌱 It's hard to believe but scientists have found tiny pieces of plastic in the most unusual places - including clouds. They are called "microplastics" and they are so small you can't see them without a microscope.

🚗🔝 The microplastics are made when larger plastic things break into smaller bits. Like when car tires wear out on the road or when clothes made with plastic get frayed in the washing machine.

💧 These tiny plastic pieces can end up in the air and water. Scientists have found them in the ocean, the salt we use for cooking, the water we drink, and even in things like beer, tea, and the fish we eat. This shows that plastic pollution is a big problem.

🐟 Microplastics have also been found inside the bodies of animals, like mice and fish, in lab experiments. But we're not sure yet if they are bad for people. Microplastics can carry harmful chemicals, and that could be a problem for our health.

🌍 While scientists study the impact of these microplastics, it makes sense to try to use less plastic and to reduce the amount of plastic pollution. That way, we can help protect our planet and ourselves from potential harm.

Here are some easy ways to use less plastic and make less pollution:
🛍️ use reusable bags or use plastic shopping bags multiple times
🥪 use containers for snacks instead of plastic wrap or bags
🍱 Wash and reuse takeout containers from restaurants
♻️ Recycle plastic instead of throwing it in your trash can
🌊 When you see plastic trash on the ground, throw it away so it doesn't end up in the ocean
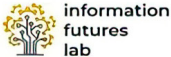
Resources to share:
What are microplastics
50+ ways to reduce plastic use

SPANISH RESOURCES
Planeta en Crisis: La invasión de los microplásticos
Expertos discuten el impacto de los microplásticos en la salud y alertan del aumento de su propagación
Los microplásticos ya están en nuestros cuerpos. ¿Cuánto nos dañan?:
Cómo vivir con menos plástico: consejos para reducir el consumo

SOURCE: Brown University School of Public Health and Florida experts.

The Information Project

Estimados Navegantes de la Información,

¡feliz lunes! Esta semana compartiremos un consejo o una pregunta y respuesta cada día en lugar de enviar todo de una vez. ¡Déjennos saber si eso es más útil! La pregunta de hoy es sobre los microplásticos.

Como siempre, ¡déjenos saber cómo está funcionando esto y qué más sería útil!

Con ustedes en comunidad, 👫👫🟡
El equipo de We Are Más & Information Futures Lab

¿Los plásticos se están metiendo a todo?¿Realmente encontraron plásticos en las nubes?¿Qué significa eso y qué podemos hacer al respecto?

🌱🌱 Es difícil creerlo pero los científicos han encontrado pequeños fragmentos de plástico en los lugares más extraños, incluso en las nubes. Se llaman "microplásticos" y son tan pequeños que no se pueden ver a simple vista, se necesitaría un microscopio.

🚗🔝 Los microplásticos se forman cuando objetos plásticos más grandes se rompen en pedazos más pequeños. Como cuando los neumáticos de los automóviles se desgastan en la carretera o cuando la ropa hecha con plástico se deshilacha en la lavadora.

💧 Estos diminutos fragmentos de plástico pueden terminar en el aire y el agua. Los científicos los han encontrado en el océano, en la sal que usamos para cocinar, en el agua que bebemos e incluso en cosas como la cerveza, el té y el pescado que comemos. Esto demuestra que la contaminación por plásticos es un gran problema.

🐟 También se han encontrado microplásticos dentro de los cuerpos de animales, como ratones y peces, en experimentos de laboratorio. Pero aún no estamos seguros de si son perjudiciales para las personas. Los microplásticos pueden transportar sustancias químicas nocivas, y eso podría ser un problema para nuestra salud.

🌍 Mientras los científicos estudian el impacto de estos microplásticos, tiene sentido tratar de usar menos plástico y reducir la cantidad de contaminación por plásticos. De esa manera, podemos ayudar a proteger nuestro planeta y a nosotros mismos de posibles daños.

Aquí hay algunas formas sencillas de usar menos plástico y generar menos contaminación:
🛍️ Utilicen bolsas reutilizables o usen bolsas de plástico varias veces
🥪 Utilicen recipientes para refrigerios en lugar de envoltorios o bolsas de plástico
🍱 Laven y reutilicen los recipientes de comida para llevar de restaurantes
♻️ Reciclen el plástico en lugar de tirarlo en la basura
🌊 Cuando vean basura de plástico en el suelo, tírenla a la basura para que no termine en el océano

🔶 *Recursos para compartir*
¿Qué son los microplásticos?
Más de 50 formas de reducir el uso de plástico

Recursos en español:
Planeta en Crisis: La invasión de los microplásticos
Expertos discuten el impacto de los microplásticos en la salud y alertan del aumento de su propagación
Los microplásticos ya están en nuestros cuerpos. ¿Cuánto nos dañan?
Cómo vivir con menos plástico: consejos para reducir el consumo

FUENTE: Escuela de Salud Pública de la Universidad Brown y expertos de Florida.

Figure 1: Sample Information Emails sent to Information Navigators in English and Spanish

Florida's Local Health Councils | Florida Department of Health establishes local health councils as a network of non-profit agencies that conduct regional health planning and implementation activities www.floridahealth.gov

⁉️ **What if I get sick and have no health insurance?**
⁉️ **If I am undocumented, can I get medical attention without getting in trouble?**

For all of us, when we get sick, we want to know we can go see a doctor or a nurse and get the medical attention we need. If you don't have health insurance or are undocumented, or both, there are still options for you to get cared for without going into debt or risking immigration troubles. It really helps to check out your options now and not wait until you have an emergency.

👐👐 **If you are a legal resident of the United States** and you can not afford a health plan, you may qualify for medicaid and your children may qualify for CHIP. Medicaid is a program that gives health insurance to people with a low income. The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) does the same for children. If you qualify depends on your income but also other factors, such as how long you have been in the United States. You can call your local Health Planning Council for more information. https://www.floridahealth.gov/provider-and-partner-resources/health-councils/

➡️ For example, "Get Covered Broward" connects people with free and low-cost health insurance (hot-line in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole 1-800-955-8771). https://brhpc.org/get-covered-broward/

👤 👤 **If you are undocumented and can't afford health insurance,** you can still access healthcare but you need to know where to go, and it helps to know your rights.

🚑 🚑 **If you have a medical emergency and need immediate care**, hospital emergency departments are required by law to see and to treat you. But you should know that as of July 1, 2023, a new Florida law requires all hospitals to ask patients their immigration status. The goal of this law is for hospitals to report to the state how much they are spending on treating undocumented patients. The hospital is **not allowed** to share your personal information with authorities or the state (this law is called HIPAA).

❤️ ❤️ **If you don't have an emergency** and can wait a few hours (or days) to be seen, or you don't feel comfortable sharing your immigration status, there are other options for you. The two most important ones are **Community Health Centers** and **Free Clinics.** Note that the new law requiring hospitalists to ask your immigration status **does not apply** to these health centers, or to any doctors offices, and that many of them specifically say they are not asking for immigration status.

TIP OF THE WEEK

Spotting fake science trying to sell you things

💰 💰 Long before we had the internet, there were people making money from selling fake cures. No wonder there is a lot of health misinformation online today trying to do the same!

🌿 🌿 This is especially true in the world of natural supplements and remedies, which is a big market in the U.S. and one where dubious claims can rake in big profits.

🧪 🍵 Here is how we get tricked: We all want to be healthy. And some supplements, vitamins and minerals can help boost our immune system. But they can't cure complex diseases like cancer or prevent COVID – even if a person looking like a scientist says so in an advertisement.

➡️ Companies can make these false claims because the U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not generally review dietary supplements, vitamins, minerals and herbal remedies. If a company wants to sell medicines like Tylenol, they have to have evidence that it works. If they want to sell a natural supplement, they don't.

🤔 **So, what can we do to protect ourselves? We can ask these questions:**

► Is it possible someone is trying to profit off of the information that's shared? Am I being sold a product?
► Is the information promoting the product appealing to fears about my health?
► Is it trying to appeal to my desire to use natural products, claiming to be "all natural?"
► Does the product make big claims about its effectiveness, claims that are difficult to prove? Does the product use vague terms like "boosts," or "supports"?
► If the claim were true, would the world look different? If it did prevent cancer, would so many people be dying from cancer?

Figure 2: Sample Information Assets shared with Information Navigators