

Santa Barbara County 2021 CSAC Challenge Executive Summary

Santa Barbara County COVID-19 RISE Ambassador Program

Overview:

The Re-opening In a Safe Environment “RISE” Ambassador Program was established to support and guide businesses on compliance with local and state COVID-19 protective measures.

Challenge:

The ever-changing State Health Officer Orders and Governor’s Executive Orders coupled with sometimes more restrictive local Health Officer Orders, created a confusing and frustrating situation for businesses trying to operate during COVID-19. Majority of local businesses wanted to do their part and were reaching out for guidance to keep their employees and patrons safe. Some of the businesses did not even know that there were restrictions that applied to them or that the restrictions or guidance had changed once again. Additionally, there were instances of language and cultural barriers that limited some of our business owners from understanding the protective measures (approx. 50% of Santa Barbara County uses Spanish as their primary language.)

Solution:

The RISE Ambassador program was born from a two-week long volunteer effort focused on businesses. Following those two weeks, the volunteers had to return to their regular careers and the program was left to one person. Recognizing the need for ongoing support, ten individuals were hired to serve as RISE Ambassadors, a dedicated phone number and email address were established, and friendly leave behind cards were created. It was important to ensure that the team included Spanish bilingual staff to ensure the ability to connect with our Spanish owned businesses. The team communicated with local jurisdictions on their concerns, maintained a business friendly, flexible schedule, and remained well versed in the state and local Health Officer Orders so that they could assist any business in need. Their approach was educational and intended to be a resource that supported the County’s local economy while maintaining a safe environment.

The RISE Ambassadors conducted in person outreach as well as support via phone and email. They were also utilized within the community, especially in historically crowded areas or busy weekends, to pass out masks and answer questions about local Health Officer Orders. These outreach efforts provided the businesses and community members a safe place to ask questions, seek help, and even correct situations without fear of being penalized. Additionally, the RISE Ambassadors were connected to other regulatory agencies that could potentially assist with building or occupancy questions should those arise due to the many outdoor temporary structures that were developed.

Lastly, the RISE Ambassadors were County employees intended to outreach to county unincorporated areas. However, the RISE Ambassador Leader also provided training and resources to the county's eight cities and the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) to support their development of local outreach programs. The County RISE Ambassadors were available to assist the Cities and UCSB in their outreach, especially when large crowds were expected. The RISE Ambassador Leader also participated in the County's Education and Compliance Taskforce to ensure consistent communications with other agency outreach efforts.

Innovation:

By going to the businesses and into the community, the RISE Ambassador Program assisted thousands of businesses to become or remain compliant with local and state COVID-19 protective measures. The businesses felt heard and supported by the Ambassadors, which created open communications with the County.

Results:

Through the RISE Ambassador Program nearly 1,500 businesses received personal contact from a RISE Ambassador. Additionally, hundreds of complaints that were received were resolved without violation because of the coaching and support from the RISE Ambassadors. When the State Blueprint for Reopening restrictions and local health officer orders were finally lifted in June 2021, there was only one business in the entire county that required legal action to gain compliance. The RISE Ambassador approach made a significant difference while building trust within the community.

Replicability:

The RISE Ambassador program could easily be replicated by other counties using employees or volunteers to engage with the community. The training program and leave behind cards are formatted for easy sharing.

Program Contact:

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