



Office of Research and Evaluation
Research Grantee Study Summary

Tufts University

Impact of COVID-Era Mutual Aid Initiatives on Civic Infrastructure in Metro-Boston

What is the background for this study?

This study explores how mutual aid has affected the civic infrastructure in East Boston, a working-class community with a large concentration of Latinx immigrants and other people of color. Mutual aid efforts sprouted quickly as COVID-19 began spreading in the area in spring 2020, bringing together community organizations, service agencies, and government with new leaders and volunteers to help serve the most vulnerable individuals. The study convenes five groups active in mutual aid to explore how mutual aid efforts affected groups during this time, provide insights into sustaining and strengthening civic engagement and infrastructure, and compile lessons learned for other practitioners and researchers.

What are the research questions?

This research examines how mutual aid has affected the civic infrastructure in the East Boston neighborhood. The co-constructed research questions include:

1. How have these efforts affected existing groups in terms of engagement methods, organizational infrastructure, and volunteers?
2. What are the opportunities and challenges for sustaining mutual aid and strengthening long-term civic infrastructure as COVID enters its next phase?

Who are your community partners?

This study team includes five graduate student research assistants and five community partners that represent the diversity of the communities of focus: Mutual Aid Eastie, Neighbors United for a Better East Boston, City Life/Vida Urbana, Centro Cooperativo de Desarrollo y Solidaridad/Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity, and Maverick Landing Community Services.

How are community members engaged in the research to action process?

The community partners are co-researchers on this study and engage in the research from beginning to end. The research team collaborates with each community partner to discuss their goals and needs for the study, providing community input in the research design. The Tufts team facilitates a process in which partners review and approve initial research plans and any changes. Community members also serve as subjects of the research, sharing their experiences working in mutual aid through interviews and convenings to inform findings. After the

Study At-A-Glance

Study Title

Impact of COVID-Era Mutual Aid Initiatives on Civic Infrastructure in Metro-Boston

Researcher

Penn Loh

Grant Cohort 2022

Timeline 2022-2025

Study Location Medford, Massachusetts

Study Topic Area(s)

Community Development

Immigrants, Immigration, & Refugees

Social Equity

Volunteering, Nonprofit Studies, and National Service

research team drafts an initial findings report, community partners review the draft to ensure the findings are representative of their experiences and relevant to their work.

What data and methods are used in this study?

Researchers collect data through interviews with key community members working in mutual aid, including those affiliated and unaffiliated with the five community partners, to incorporate their individual and shared experiences into the study. The study also convenes group discussion sessions for community research partners to reflect, share, and learn together and synthesize findings on their collective experiences of mutual aid during the pandemic. The study holds all group convenings in Spanish and English, with simultaneous translation, to facilitate full participation.

How does this research translate to community action?

This research facilitates community building and knowledge sharing among community partners and other mutual aid stakeholders, many of whom have not yet had an opportunity to reflect with others on their experience with mutual aid during the pandemic. Through documenting lessons learned and changes in how people, organizations, governments, and funders have worked with one another, this research provides insights that partners can use to inform and chart their organizational course for the next several years.

What are potential opportunities to apply study findings and/or build on this research?

This study provides insights into challenges and opportunities for community partners providing mutual aid, including during public emergencies. Findings may also inform how community partners, funders, and government stakeholders may best collaborate and navigate evolving relationships in service provision and educate partners on best practices for movement building and organizing.

For more information on the study:

Study Website	Mutual Aid Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Strengthening Civic Infrastructure in East Boston Through Community Care (final report, May 2024): English version , Spanish version			
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AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation holds grant competitions to foster scholarly research on civic health, address knowledge gaps in civic engagement and volunteerism, and identify new ideas and methodological approaches to service.

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- See a [Snapshot of Research Grantee Activities and Insights](#).
- Explore the [AmeriCorps Open Data Research Grantee Dataset](#).

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