

SLO County Indigenous Mexican Enumeration and Demographics Study

Community Advisory Committee

San Luis Obispo County Public Health has funded a study to determine a population estimate and perform a demographic study of Mesoamerican Indigenous Communities living and working in San Luis Obispo County. The study is a collaboration of community-based organizations serving Indigenous communities with experienced immigrant survey researchers.

Mixteco, Zapoteco, Trique and other Indigenous Mexicans face systemic barriers to accessing COVID-19 and health-related resources and services. Indigenous Mesoamericans face additional language, literacy, and cultural barriers. They are often wrongly classified as Spanish speakers, as many people are not aware of the existence of Indigenous languages and assume that anyone that is Hispanic or Latinx speaks Spanish. In addition, Indigenous Mesoamericans may say they speak Spanish, even if they do not, in order to avoid discrimination. States in Mexico such as Oaxaca where Mixteco and other Indigenous languages and variants are spoken are the poorest in the country. These states are rural, with limited access to education.

Furthermore, Indigenous Mexicans generally work in agricultural and service industries that pay low wages, while also living in crowded, sub-standard or in unconventional dwellings such as garages, trailers, and cars. Many are undocumented or have family members that are undocumented, so they tend to be hesitant to trust outsiders.

Although there are many challenges to getting demographic information and a population estimate of Indigenous Mexican communities, it is important to have these data so that County and partnering organizations can fulfill their missions and provide culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate services to Indigenous Mexicans in SLO County.

The Mesoamerican Indigenous study will involve the collaboration of Indigenous community-based organizations (CBOs), health clinics, and community educators that have achieved a high level of trust (*confianza*) with the population through long-term and on-going support efforts. Together with trained immigrant survey researchers, the team will conduct a thorough and systematic survey of this community living and working in San Luis Obispo County.

The objective of the survey is to produce information that allows San Luis Obispo County public officials, service providers, policy and program designers and migrant advocates to better fulfill their missions to address migrant and resident needs. Results of the survey, planned for July 2023, will inform development and delivery of COVID-19 and other health outreach and education materials. The research will be a model that can be utilized as a pilot and model for other counties and will be documented as such.

The research team consists of:

Co-Principal Investigators: Mario Espinoza-Kulick, PhD (Cuesta College) and Bonnie Bade, PhD (CSU San Marcos)

Community Research Director: Genevieve Flores-Haro, MPA (Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP));
Expert consultant: Rick Mines, PhD (Lead author of Indigenous Farmworker Study)
Data consultant and analyst: Alex Espinoza-Kulick, MA, PhD (QueerProfs)
Project Director: Joel Diringer, JD, MPH (Diringer and Associates)

Bi-lingual and tri-lingual staff from MICOP will conduct the community assessment, aided by other local community leaders from the Indigenous communities.

A community advisory committee will provide input to the research team on research design, connection with community, implementation of field research, interpretation of findings and dissemination. Advisors may benefit from participation by contributing to a collaborative knowledge base about local Indigenous Mexican communities, directing how data is presented to local officials and stakeholders, and connecting with other partners and service-providers throughout the region. We anticipate quarterly meetings over the course of the next year.

The community advisory committee will include representatives from Indigenous communities and organizations that work with these populations in San Luis Obispo County. The research team is reaching out to representatives from Herencia Indigena, SLO Public Health Department (Demetrio Morales-Salazar), Migrant Education, Promotores Collaborative, SLO County UndocuSupport, Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño (CBDIO), community health clinics, legal services, members of the SLO Farmworker Health Task Force and other Indigenous serving organizations.

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