

[**Coloradans for the Common Good**](https://www.cocommongood.org/) **(CCG)**

**Acting in the Face of Crisis**

*Updated August 10, 2020*

Despite initial concerns about our ability to organize in an environment where we cannot meet in person, CCG leaders have managed to act in the face of this crisis.  The time and energy spent building a network of relationships of trust has allowed us to respond with velocity as this crisis has unfolded.  “Power precedes program” is what we say when people ask why we prioritize building relationships long before jumping into action.  The last few months have been a reminder that “power precedes program.”

There is overwhelming evidence that power—the ability to act—is institutional.  Our approach, therefore, is *institutional* organizing.  Congregations, unions and civic organizations can be the mediating institutions that bring together ordinary people so their voices are heard.  In Colorado we have two broad-based institutional organizing projects affiliated with the IAF: **Coloradans for the Common Good** (CCG) along the Front Range and **Mountain Voices Project** (MVP) in the Roaring Fork Valley.  Some of the actions listed here have been a collaboration between CCG and MVP.

This is a summary of our recent work.

**Training**

On Feb 28 - Mar 1, just two weeks before the crisis hit, we conducted a 3-day IAF training in Denver with over 50 leaders from the Denver metro area, the Western Slope, Ft. Collins, Boulder and Colorado Springs.  We have recently added three member institutions from Boulder and Colorado Springs, expanding our presence up and down the Front Range.

**Essential Workers**

In partnership with UFCW Local 7, which represents 23,000 workers in Colorado, we urged Governor Jared Polis to classify grocery store workers as “essential workers” so that they would qualify for the state’s emergency order for emergency health paid leave and free child care.  Though UFCW has asked for these protections, their claims went unheard for almost two weeks.  Following our intervention, we got a meeting with the governor, who agreed with us and directed the executive directors of three state departments (Health, Human Services and Labor) to meet with us and find a solution.  As a result, over [20,000 grocery store workers got these protections.](https://mailchi.mp/5eee129a052f/win-for-colorado-grocery-store-workers?e=%5BUNIQID%5D)  See Chalkbeat article [here](https://chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2020/03/30/colorado-emergency-child-care-expands-to-include-grocery-construction-workers/).

The following week, after a health scare at a meat processing plant in Greeley, we [asked for](https://mcusercontent.com/8cec8fa57d991f43f2917f79f/files/78f8b0ab-6b1b-4829-a6e0-dd711be6bdee/Nogueira_JBS_4_3_20.pdf) and got a meeting with company executives.  JBS S.A. executives agreed to implement additional safety features immediately.  We also met with the governor staff and the director of the CO Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) to ask for the “essential workers” protections for food processing workers as well.  The state agreed and granted these benefits to an [additional 30,000 food and beverage workers](https://mailchi.mp/af3ef713da0d/another-win-for-colorado-workers?e=%5BUNIQID%5D) in Colorado.

More recently we have addressed the ongoing concerns at the JBS plant in meetings with Attorney General Weiser, State Treasurer Young and CDPHE Director Ryan. On August 5, CDPHE Director Ryan agreed to conduct all future inspections of the JBS plant accompanied by UFCW Local 7 representatives and to interview workers without supervisors present. She also agreed to attend a panel with workers so she can hear the stories first hand (that panel will be held in the next 2-3 weeks.)

**Fair Wages**

CCG leaders partnered with Education Support Professionals (ESPs), including custodians, paraprofessionals, food workers, maintenance workers, security staff, facility managers, and office support staff in Denver Public Schools in their fight for fair pay. Following a June action with 250 ESPs, teachers and CCG leaders, the ESPs won the right to bargain all together--a first in DPS' history.  In mid-July they won a fair wage raise! In a [joint letter](https://mcusercontent.com/8cec8fa57d991f43f2917f79f/files/9944445e-2d83-40e1-a078-9303d658836d/ESP_TA_Announcement_to_Members.pdf) from the worker associations to their members, they "thank DCTA and **Coloradans for the Common Good** for standing in solidarity with us."

**Internet Access**

After a number of teachers alerted us that students were not connecting online for remote learning, we learned that undocumented families faced obstacles to signing up for Comcast’s service.  Their application process first asks for a Social Security Number, deterring many families from proceeding with it.  According to the Colorado Department of Education, 64,000 students still had no access to internet access at home as of mid-April.

We met with Comcast executives on April 20 to propose changes to their application process (see stories on [Chalkbeat](https://co.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/13/21225473/remove-internet-barriers-for-undocumented-families-colorado-teachers-unions-urge) and [Colorado Public Radio](https://www.cpr.org/2020/04/14/some-undocumented-families-dont-feel-safe-applying-for-free-internet-making-remote-learning-even-more-difficult/?fbclid=IwAR16e5IRh06lFx7Lhhc1-uw0n1Id-JjJSNtBc-1hybE-dRT82Rj8umB2Sl0).)

Responding to CCG's proposals, Comcast changed its on-line application to the *Internet Essentials* program, making it more accessible to undocumented families.  Comcast also agreed to extend its offer of 60 days free internet for new subscribers through the end of the year. These changes are being rolled out nationwide. Read the stories in [Colorado Public Radio](https://www.cpr.org/2020/07/15/colorado-gears-up-for-online-learning-with-digital-access-push-and-one-victory-for-undocumented-families/) and [The Colorado Sun](https://coloradosun.com/2020/07/17/colorado-students-schools-education-online-learning-remote-coronavirus-covid-19/).

CCG is planning an Internet Access Summit at the end of August. Internet service providers and Susana Cordova, DPS Superintendent, agreed to participate. Invitees also include superintendents of other Colorado school districts and elected officials, including AG Weiser. The goal of the summit is to collaborate on solutions for expanding internet access with the recognition that internet access has become a utility, especially during the pandemic.

**Back-to-School**

As we know, there’s been controversy about whether to re-open schools for in-person learning or to start school this fall with remote learning. The Denver Classroom Teachers Association advocated for remote learning and DPS decided to postpone in-person instruction until October 16th. To obtain feedback beyond educator voices, CCG trained dozens of DPS teachers to conduct house meetings with parents of their students and with parents in their institutions (one was held with B’nai parents). Over 200 families participated in these house meetings to discuss questions, preferences, and concerns about their children returning to remote instruction or to in-person classes. CCG leaders met with Susana Cordova, DPS Superintendent, to share preliminary findings. House meetings are continuing with the goal of reaching 500 families. Superintendent Cordova said she found our meeting helpful and offered to meet with CCG on a regular basis during the ’20 -’21 school year.

**Rent & Mortgage**

Housing costs have been prohibitive for many in Colorado during “normal times;” rent/mortgage are now impossible for the tens of thousands of families who have lost their income.

CCG leaders held a “virtual press conference” on April 7 (see [video here](https://www.facebook.com/COCommonGood/videos/212578323409040/)) calling on banks, credit unions and landlord associations to join us in crafting solutions (see [letter to lenders here](https://mcusercontent.com/8cec8fa57d991f43f2917f79f/files/f374d208-f240-44bf-a991-e68cea4e5789/Banks_Invitation_Letter_4_8_2020.pdf) and coverage from [Colorado Politics](https://www.coloradopolitics.com/coronavirus/faith-labor-coalition-calls-for-keeping-people-housed-during-pandemic/article_50f8933e-7911-11ea-b667-1b00c16db0c9.html) and [Westword](https://www.westword.com/news/covid-19-and-denver-landlords-who-say-theyre-victims-too-11682351)).  As a result, our leaders have met with executives from several banks and credit unions, the Governor’s office, the State Senate Finance Committee, organizations supporting small landlords and Attorney General Phil Weiser. Our leaders also wrote an [Op-Ed](https://coloradosun.com/2020/04/19/colorado-coronavirus-landlord-tenant-renter-eviction-opinion/?utm_source=The+Colorado+Sun&utm_campaign=752014412e-Sun-Up&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2e5f9a0f1b-752014412e-66432725&mc_cid=752014412e&mc_eid=51fb693f5d) on this topic.

We are now working with AG Weiser’s office to co-host a gathering of lenders, landlords, and advocates so as to craft a coordinated strategy and communicate a clear and consistent message of how we might avoid a wave of evictions and foreclosures.

**Federal Stimulus**

Early in the pandemic we crafted a set of [principles](https://www.swiaf.org/covid19_petition) for an economic stimulus plan that protects those who urgently need help the most – American workers, families, and small businesses on the front lines of this national emergency – and mobilized our leaders to contact our congressional delegation in support of it.

We are now mobilizing IAF leaders nationwide to put pressure on US Senators to pass a bill that more closely resembles the relief measures included in the Heroes Act approved by the US House of Representatives. We are pursuing meetings with Senators Gardner and Bennet to address our priorities.

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