This year’s community award goes to a collection of individuals and community groups who responded to a coronavirus outbreak at the JBS Beef Plant in Hyrum, Utah, in June 2020. This grassroots mobilization was led by a network of volunteer faculty, students and staff, as well as members of the community and local organizations.

USU’s Crescencio Lopez Gonzalez, Celina Wille and Jess Lucero joined Liz Villegas, a local advocate for the Latinx community, to lead an effort to collect and distribute food and household supplies, and donations to help with rent, utilities and medical support to more than 350 individuals and families in Cache Valley who needed to isolate or quarantine due to the outbreak.

Janis Boettinger, Helga Van Miegroet and Anthony Turnhollow were instrumental in collecting and distributing tens of thousands of dollars in donations. Chris Gonzalez and Amanda Barrandey assisted with outreach by using their strong ties with members of the Spanish-speaking community. Claudia Wright, Marina Bernal, and members of Cache Refugee & Immigrant Connection, St. Thomas Aquinas, Church of God and Friends at the Temple Boulevard Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints all made significant contributions to these crisis response efforts.

Since the outbreak, members of the grassroots coalition have extended their partnerships to better serve our community moving forward. A diverse team of faculty and community leaders led by Lucero has been awarded nearly $150,000 in grant funding that will support ongoing efforts to improve service provision in our community in areas ranging from COVID-19 relief, housing, financial literacy, credit building and advocacy. These new partnerships and solidified coalitions will help build a strong Cache Valley community with a higher capacity for