

Report of Encuentro Latino

Latino Encounter

October 2000

Steering Committee

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Mental Health Association of Middle Tennessee

Juan Canedo
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Robinson Regen
Mental Health Association of Middle Tennessee

Renata Soto
Untied Way of Metropolitan Nashville

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Editorial Committee

Garrett Harper, Author
Mitzi Cerjan
Ellen Tighe
Dr. Terry Horgan
Renata Soto
Robinson Regen

Report of Encuentro Latino/Latino Encounter

Introduction

Encuentro Latino marks a new page in understanding Nashville's recent population growth. With more than 85,000 immigrants (___ % of total population), the largest and most diverse change in population composition in Nashville's history creates the need to, explores the nuances, implications, opportunities and challenges we face as we come together to grow and serve one another.

Over one-half of Nashville's eighty-five thousand foreign-born persons are of Latin-American origin. This Latino population has come to Nashville as to many U.S. cities and rural areas in recent years in search of opportunity. The Middle Tennessee Latinos are from diverse nations, social-economic groups and occupations. They clearly have different aspirations, expectations and perceptions. While fitting traditional population transfer trends, our Latino neighbors are unique with distinctive gifts and struggles.

The Latino Encounter is a joint initiative, funded in part by the Frist Foundation and St. Thomas Health Services, to discern the changes created and experienced by Nashville's Latino population. The Mental Health Association of Middle Tennessee, the United Way of Metropolitan Nashville and Woodbine Community Organization convened this important new initiative. Other partners in the project include staff from the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, Vanderbilt University Office of Volunteer Activities, Tennessee Justice Center, Tennessee Carpenters Regional Council, Council of Community Services, and the Global Center. We recognized that an understanding of the broad demographic changes and issues of Nashville Latinos is primary and critical to understanding the assets and diversity and to identifying service needs and gaps of the new population.

The Latino Encounter, is simultaneously a process and a project. Fifteen Spanish-language focus groups, ten English-language focus groups and a general exploratory survey of the Latino population together form the core of research that can guide further discussion and study of issues emerging. Meanwhile, a broad representation of existing local Latino leadership

serves as an Advisory Board to this collaborative effort to gain insights into this population and its issues. This report is meant to be a beginning, not an end. It is our hope that we Nashvillians continuously examine the assets and needs of all neighbors so that together we continue to prosper as individuals, groups and an urban center.

Summary of Findings

The information and insights from the data collection processes of Encuentro Latino provide a framework for continuing dialogue and exploration around the many existing and emerging issues involved. Strong themes and directional indicators obtained can provide new clarity in determining further paths for discussion, planning and policy.

The information garnered in this collaborative was of a general nature in order to move from the broad to the specific in data collection and understanding as well as in strategic thinking around these issues and challenges. The findings are presented in three parts: the summary of response to the Spanish-language focus groups, the summary of response to the English-language focus groups and the summary section of insights and recommendations. Within each there is discussion on direct participant response, and inference and observation by the facilitation team. As a first effort for Encuentro Latino those threads of insight less conducive to strict quantification seemed most needed. Frequency, intensity, and spontaneity all served as key factors in identifying opinions and attitudes shared by participants.

Spanish-Language Groups

Encuentro Latino initiated a first-ever attempt to convene a cross-section of Nashville's Latino population to elicit responses on a wide range of aspects of Latino life experiences in the city. Fifteen groups (153 persons) contributed nearly thirty hours of response time to directed discussion of general issues, concerns and aspirations of the city's Latino community. Most groups were facilitated by Rafael Robert of Eli Lilly Corporation, all were conducted in Spanish.

There are widely held perceptions that run through a broad cross-section of Nashville's Latino community. Opposing viewpoints on many issues were less frequent. Both the

professional facilitators and the review team noted the earnestness with which participants approached this opportunity to express opinions in a formal setting, lending further credibility to the data, and the findings and inferences presented here. Differing views of significant frequency, intensity or spontaneity are discussed. Consensus viewpoints are elaborated at greatest length.

Facilitators asked all participants a series of general questions and generating discussion and encouraging participants to speak either from personal experiences or from knowledge or perceptions acquired indirectly. Each person was encouraged to express views openly and spontaneously, only observing regard for others' views and their right to speak. Finally, all provided brief biographical information for the group, with some contributing considerable longer personal histories and anecdotes.

The basic questions framing each focus group were:

- 1) What has been good about your/the Latino experience in Nashville?
- 2) What has been bad about your/the Latino experience in Nashville?
- 3) What has been easy about your/the Latino experience in Nashville?
- 4) What has been difficult about your/the Latino experience in Nashville?
- 5) What are your hopes, dreams and fears or the hopes, dreams and fears of the Latino community in Nashville?
- 6) What are your links or the links of the Latino community in Nashville back to other countries?
- 7) What are the contributions of the Latino community to Nashville?
- 8) What recommendations do you have for the future for Nashville's Latino community?

Responses to the first four questions are discussed in some detail since these formed the bulk of discussions and greatest variety of comments and views.

- 1) *What has been good about your/the Latino experience in Nashville?*

The increase in Nashville's total Latino population has been dramatic. From some 8,000 reported in Davidson County in 1990, current estimates by Metro Social Services place the

county's Hispanic population at approximately 45,000. An important force attracting immigrants to new lands throughout history has been economic opportunity and persecution. Not surprisingly, then, far and away the most common response to this question was that Nashville attracted Latinos with employment opportunities. While comments often were tempered by concerns about workplace conditions or other unpleasant or difficult aspects of work, such as transportation to jobs, consensus about job availability in this area was among the highest in any category of response.

Somewhat less frequently, respondents cited safety and a quiet setting as important positive features of the city. Many commented on experiences in other U.S. cities, often in Texas or California, where prevalence of gang activity, school violence, drug trade and other criminal activity was considered higher and often strong enough to prompt a relocation when coupled with other favorable attributes of Nashville. Significantly, parents, women and somewhat older participants more often cited Nashville's safe image as a drawing factor for migration. Finally, a few other favorable aspects of the Nashville experience were cited sporadically. These included a "welcoming attitude" by the city's inhabitants and/or its business community, the relative lack of discrimination toward Latinos in Nashville, a Latino presence in the city and friends already established in the city who offer support networks of family, friends or institutions.

Noteworthy here is the dissimilarity of feeling of a few persons choosing Nashville, in part, for its nondiscriminatory climate. A much greater volume of sentiment viewed discrimination as prevalent. It is important to note that respondents perceiving little or no discrimination tended to be residents of the city of a longer duration. Many tended to rely more on personal experiences and relationships than generalizations. Some had a deeper sense of the complexity of discrimination among various Latino national, or racial groups in the countries of origin and within the Nashville Latino population. As significant, discrimination, both actual and felt, may be linked to the individual's status. Those with incomplete documentation sense they must accept whatever comes their way.

2) *What has been bad about your/the Latino experience in Nashville?*

As may be expected from a large group of people relocating to a city of different language, cultural, legal and economic patterns, there are significant adjustment processes for all parties to the changed and changing environment. Many responses and themes in this section stemmed from a mixture of personal experience, anecdotal hearsay and perception regarding unfavorable aspects of the Latino experience in Nashville. Although the intensity of feelings was quite high for many respondents, the consensus of what was unfavorable was less thorough. Interestingly, however, this was the one area of discussion where opening remarks by one speaker on a volatile issue or attitude seemed frequently to empower or inspire others to add comments and examples, usually supportive. Latino Encounter by asking the questions in public may have breached the wall of silence some Latino immigrants carry with them due to oppressive situations in their countries of origin or their undocumented status. Respondents also tended to focus more on very specific single issues in this area, often enhanced by personal experiences. Those with fewer personal unhappy experiences tended to generalize about a greater number of less focused, perceived or rumored bad aspects of Latinos' life experiences in the city.

Discrimination and relations with various groups, Latino and non-Latino, tended to dominate discussion and draw out strongest, most spontaneous and most reinforcing comments. Specifically, Latinos expressed dismay over discriminatory practices in the workplace impacting Latino workers due to a variety of factors, including language barriers, issues of proper legal documentation, imperfect match of skills and occupations, lack of seniority or experience with the employer or in an occupation and simply prejudice by race and ethnicity. Detailed examples were offered of abuses in compensation, scheduling and overtime work, assignment of duties, and derogatory and abusive verbal treatment. Those expressing strong feelings in this area tended to believe native-born workers, regardless of race, ability to perform the job or any other factors, were given preferred treatment. Worker groups, in particular, deemed lack of awareness of employee rights and lack of awareness and means of getting information and legal assistance as particular hardships in remedying perceived or real abuses.

More complex in many respects was discussion around prejudice among various Latino sub-groups in Nashville. While numerous persons across many of the groups cited prejudice

present by both black and white native-born against Latinos, some of the most intense feelings reflected prejudice against Mexican-Americans by other Latinos, prejudice against Latinos due to a perception by non-Latinos that all Latinos are Mexican-Americans, prejudice against Puerto Ricans by other Latinos due to Puerto Rican's U.S. citizenship rights, and prejudice by longer-term Latino residents and Latino citizens against recent immigrants, non-citizens and the undocumented. A few also expressed feelings of prejudice due to skin color or identification as a Latino in appearance. Although several persons related strong feelings based on personal incidents, others felt equally strongly based on observation and perception of other's experiences. In a few instances, participants rebutted the statements stressing prevalence of prejudice by noting the existence of prejudice by class ethnicity in countries of Latin America and in other U.S. cities. Several persons made a special point of emphasizing a complete lack of prejudice in their lives and experiences in Nashville. Those in greatest contact with a diversity of persons and situations, often in workplaces, shopping venues or English as a second language classes, appeared more likely to: 1) have some experience or recognition of prejudice and discrimination and 2) to be more attuned to the situations and nuances of prejudicial behaviors and discriminatory practices and to be more likely to verbalize this. Interestingly, neither younger groups (students) nor older participants (parents and others) stressed great concern about prejudice occurring in the public schools. Instead limited interaction and barriers to achievement (language, culture, etc.), were deemed most influential in Latino students' isolation within the educational system.

A significant area of discussion involved fear of involvement by Latinos with police and authority figures and institutions in general. Several incidents were named regarding perception of police detaining Latinos based on ethnicity or language. Additionally, little countering comment exhibited a positive role the police may currently play in Latino life. Due to the widely cited lack of documentation in the population the fear of police was interwoven with fear of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and other institutions subsequent to any interaction with police. In terms of emotional intensity, distrust and avoidance of police, authority figure and institutions seemed far more real and an immediate, daily threat to Latino life personally or collectively.

Perhaps mocking the INS is a mechanism used to mask the real fear that our Latino neighbors live with at all times. At any moment, one's life could be destroyed, family and friends left behind and the individual incarcerated and deported.

The remaining areas noted as unfavorable attributes of the Latino experience tended to be either very generalized to the entire population or being very person- or organization-specific. First, English as a Second Language (ESL) services were cited and reiterated by many participants as inferior in fulfilling population capacity needs. The general sense was that little concerted effort is given to ESL instruction that is affordable, accessible and life- or work-relevant. Criticisms included: classes being too basic or too many skill levels mixed in one class, too expensive, language classes being inconvenient for workers' schedules and inconveniently located.

Closely tied to the sense that the language barrier for many Latinos is a hindering factor to personal and community advancement, participants also cited the lack of availability of translated information or interpretation services at least in critical areas of their life. Not only unhappy about mere unavailability of Spanish language materials and interpretation services, respondents expressed much frustration that little outreach effort or public and private sector 'consciousness' has risen to remedy the deficiencies in face of a large and growing Latino presence. The sense of dismay generally derived from a view that the city and its organizations remain callous at worst or naïve at best in accommodating Latinos that are constitute an appreciable working population, pay local and other taxes and seek minimally fulfillment of basic needs as available to their non-Latino peers. Most notable in terms of anxiety and disillusion was a wide held view, supported by many personal examples, of health care emergency other routine services, and legal services being either denied entirely or essentially inaccessible in Spanish to those not capable of communication in English. No other institutional area was cited with such degree of frequency as that of health care services in this regard although legal services did appear recurrently.

A series of unfavorable situations in the community were named that related to Latino businesses and professionals taking advantage of fellow Latinos either through overcharging for

goods or services or through falsely promising a certain type, degree or quality of goods and services. These concerns often prompted other participants to suggest advocacy for a more holistic effort to promote orientation, information and delivery of services to Latinos in a free or fairly priced and discernibly credible fashion. Additional bad practices commonly experienced included prepaid telephone calling cards that offer dubious monetary value when activated (high connection fees) and excessive fees charged for local check cashing privileges and money orders to be sent home. A few participants viewed these and other occurrences as part of larger issues of predatory practices resulting from Latinos' frequent lack of consumer credit accounts, inexperience in using financial institutions, and financial planning. Some cannot use financial institutions because of lack of documentation.

Although only a few respondents discussed the unfavorable issues in a more holistic and abstract manner, these persons, often professionals or those residing longer in the city or in the U.S., were frequently quite articulate and compelling within their groups. This group sensed that much of the negative Latino predicament in Nashville may stem from a lack of Latino awareness about legal rights; a shortfall in organizational leadership, advocacy or support for Latino interests; and a broad sense that larger-scale Latino migration to the city is still fairly recent. They viewed adjustments and hardships as inevitable, although remedies might somehow be expedited.

3) *What has been easy about your/the Latino experience in Nashville?*

Despite elaborating on many hardships and disliked aspects of Latino experiences in Nashville, participants frequently expressed genuine optimism and satisfaction about life in the city both individually and collectively. However, only a few persons were vocal about what things were easy, they provided, few detailed examples, broad supporting commentary was limited or absent. In other words, there appeared to be modest feelings about the range of easy aspects of the migration, settlement and life transition in Nashville for Latinos.

Predominant in all settings was the idea that currently getting jobs is easy in Nashville. Beyond this, some noted problems with the jobs that are available (employer discrimination, bad working conditions, inability to acquire jobs or training nearer to skills and interests).

A second widely stated and supported view suggested the importance of friends and family already in the city to ease the transition of newcomers. This reliance on an ethnic social support network may begin before arrival and is much in line with the often-mentioned concern by the “middle generation” of Latinos about mainstream deficiencies recognizing Latino needs.

A very small number of participants noted ease with a great number of areas of life in Nashville, including obtaining housing, a car (this idea had more concurring remarks) or adult English language instruction. Both students and parents generally felt positive or neutral regarding the ‘easiness’ of school experience for Latino students although there was limited elaboration on this topic in most group discussions. Nor were there a significant number of student focus groups.

Interestingly, ‘easy’ parts of the Nashville Latino experience were rather ambiguous compared to most of the other topics of discussion. These often went little beyond the generalities of finding jobs and taking advantage of internal Latino resources and support. The limited range of comment suggests that either there is little specifically that was or is ‘easy’ about Latino life or that intensity of feeling about the ‘ease’ of a multiplicity of issues is not very strong. Given the candor present in general it seems unlikely that participants felt compelled to offer gratuitous praise or rebuke of easy transitions.

4) *What has been hard about your/the Latino experience in Nashville?*

Of the four basic dimensions of life experience – good, bad, easy, hard – this one clearly elicited the strongest, the broadest and the most detailed responses. It also proved the greatest prompt for those participants, if otherwise less engaged, to offer supporting or new comments and examples. In aggregate, the sense of the groups was that life has been hard in

many ways. However, participants also were often quick to weave this discussion with response to the later question on recommendations for the Latino community in Nashville.

Three broad areas dominated discussion on hardships for Latinos – transportation options, health care services and language barriers and training. These appeared to be strong interests by many participants in empathizing with others expressing hardship experiences and observations. Also, the continued return to some of these issues in varying contexts reinforced their importance in the Latino experience and suggested participant desire to learn more about these problems, to convey them through Encuentro Latino and to offer recommendations where possible.

The issue of transportation challenges pervaded a substantial portion of the focus group discussions. Participants noted that Nashville appears to be almost uniquely limited in its options for reasonable means of transporting Latino (and other) persons to work, to shop, to religious services, and to other destinations. Instances of failure of public transportation to offer even most basic expectations were extremely high, including routine lack of service on weekends, long delays and variability in schedules of service, routing unrelated to perceived user needs, route schedules inappropriate to work times. In short, very vocal and focused treatment of this issue was unrelenting and without opposing comments from other participants.

Respondents, likewise, considered the alternative to public transportation offerings – owning and driving a vehicle – to be replete with difficulties and inconsistencies from their viewpoint. Here again, several persons drew the ironies and relationships between the inadequacies of public transportation, inhibiting laws addressing driving privileges and the contributions made by Latinos to Nashville's workforce and economy in recent years. Across the participant groups there repeated mentions of the local inconsistencies in a need for more workers in the area, the lack of Spanish language driver's license testing, the ease in purchasing a car, and the necessity ability to drive without insurance or a driver's license. The frustration derived from these various issues seems as compounded as the number of sub-issues. Many seemed to feel that even incremental change and improvement would be helpful along these

issues. Those that lived prior in other U.S. cities often contrasted Nashville's limitations and economic ironies for Latinos.

Close in intensity of feeling and frequency of examples were concerns and frustrations with the health care system. While slightly fewer persons addressed this area (though still a substantial number), those speaking often were emphatic in their dismay with situations they have experienced and/or of those believed to be commonplace and contrary to meeting basic humanitarian, ethical, medical, and legal obligations to provide needed care.

Specific items of concern in health care services for Latinos included a widespread failure to provide Spanish interpretation where needed, a sporadic failure to serve Latinos due to one or more types of discrimination (cultural, financial, legal), and ethical abuses (coerced or uninformed contracting and treatment). Costs of health care services and ineffective access to TennCare or other insurance providers were cited by many as especially onerous aspects of the general problem.

The issue of language access transcended many areas of everyday life experiences. As commentary on hardships for Latinos, many participants were quick to cite their strong desire to learn English as well as a hope that translation and interpretation could be available as an interim goal, particularly for emergency situations. In fact, the tone of sentiment was less strident or demanding than rationally emphasizing a shared community objective of enhancing opportunity for Latino achievement and self-reliance. Many seemed puzzled by the perceived inability to respond to breaking or bridging language barriers. Some noted their desire to learn English but lack of opportunity through long workdays and family responsibilities.

The issues of documentation for legal status in the U.S. arose frequently as hardship compounding others relating to work, housing, financial matters, health care, education and training and others. Often, speakers were quite eloquent in framing the dilemmas facing both Latinos and the city and its economic and humanitarian interests. Essentially, all policies relating to documentation are handled at the U.S. federal level from enforcement of laws to adjudication of cases and incarceration of persons at least the perceived threat of removal of those not complying with current policy and laws. Group participants, voiced frustration that the city, its

institutions and its population, which significantly benefit from efforts of Latinos, documented and undocumented, fail to raise a credible, collective voice of concern or advocacy for realistic change on their behalf so that Latinos can better share their assets.

Related hardships to documentation and the INS included the unresponsiveness and distance of the nearest INS office (in Memphis), the results of misinformation and fraudulent and/or predatory practices in the community for gaining access to documents. Many noted that some institutions and individuals use documentation status of persons selectively to harass, threaten or ignore Latinos and their requests. The last item, particularly, seemed permeate through many facets of the Latino life experience. Employers, apartment managers, health care workers, neighbors (Latino and non-Latino), and others were named at least once, but often repeatedly, as perpetrators of the fear felt by Latinos. Participants characterized this fear as a community potentially experiencing the powerful threat to inform authorities about real or perceived documentation inconsistencies of Latinos individuals, families, worker groups and other groups. This issue arose as a recommendation and as a need for greater awareness of rights and responsibilities by Latinos, stronger advocacy within and for the Latino community's rights, and more coordinated information dissemination and collection by all parties involved with Latinos.

Other hardships facing Latinos living in Nashville include lack of skills for desired jobs, lack of means to acquire training for new or enhanced skills (issues of accessibility via cost, language, documentation, transferred credentials), lack of credit history, access to financial institutions, or access to basic necessities (buying or renting housing, buying vehicles on fairer terms, getting access to capital for entrepreneurship), and lack of means to help family members which impedes individual achievement (dependence for transportation, limited mobility, crowded housing conditions, lack of health insurance, inability to gain language or skills to enter or advance in the job market).

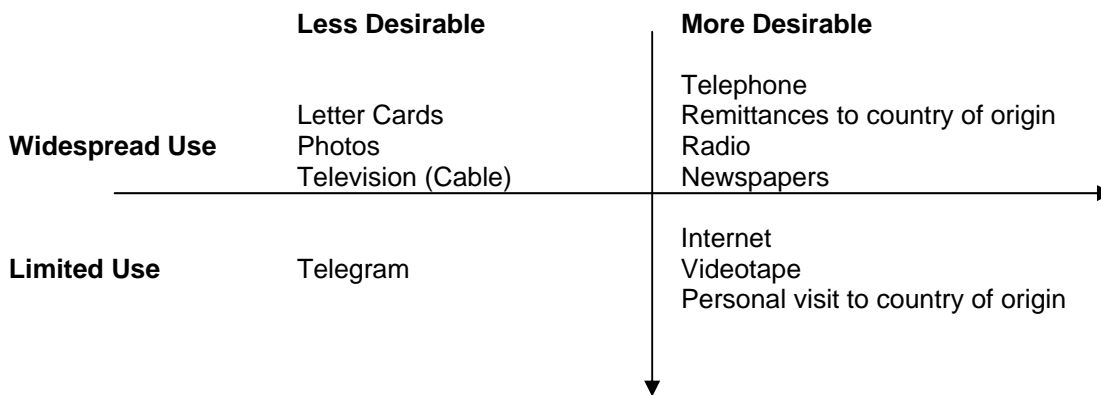
More than any other area of discussion, the hardship issues uncovered many circular processes that exhibited qualities of the "vicious cycle of poverty". Although, not using this term, participants clearly voiced frustration at lack of opportunity due to barriers (discrimination and lack

of services) and lack of their own assets (chiefly financial, skills and mobility), that perpetuate struggles to improve their condition. In this regard, many respondents' aspirations reflected a desire that life for the children be better as the greatest outcome and reason for migrating to Nashville.

Links

Nashville's Latinos expressed the presence of very active links back to home countries. Telephone links are significant. Many send money home. Not surprisingly for a recent immigrant group, many family members and friends have extensive networks both within Nashville and in their home countries. Contact between these groups is extensive and illustrated by the schematic shown according to media most cited for facilitation.

Communications, Information, and other Links in the Latino Community



Hopes, Dreams and Fears

This was an area of relatively little elaborated discussion despite the question's presence in every session. Perhaps not surprisingly, Latinos as for most immigrants, is to seek a better life for themselves, their families and succeeding generations. Clearly, some of the same issues which have attracted Latinos to settle in Nashville will continue to be those issues important to this desire – a safe place to live, abundant jobs, an “accepting” environment, a social support network.

However, two special areas of hopes were prominent. An appreciable contingent of participants desire ultimately to return to a country of origin. This is a feature more common to Latinos than to other immigrants due in part to these countries' proximity. Implications for integrating such person into the community's life and for understanding the needs and challenges in discerning between these populations are quite significant and this was revealed in some group discussions.

The fears of Latinos in Nashville are collectively more tangible and conducive to identification than are their collective hopes and dreams. Fears tended to center very heavily around documentation issues, either for speakers themselves or on behalf of others. For with lack of documentation comes an inability to drive legally, or work legally, or attend school, or otherwise have a full relationship with the community as do other residents. Fear of any authority figures or entities detecting any of these discrepancies in Latinos' lives almost invariably means fear of the subsequent deportation from the U.S. An additional burden of fear, then also, stems from interaction with authorities regarding crime, safety, seeking help or direction, or just becoming involved in everyday situations that may lead to contact with authorities. It is safe to characterize the Latino collective life in Nashville as one of great, frequently unspoken, fear. Coming often from societies where relationships with authority may be different, coupled with the stringent U.S. Laws in place since 1996, Latinos have accommodated this life of fear by: 1) considering the fear a reasonable exchange for opportunity to realize hopes and dreams, 2) a sense of fatalism stemming from cultural background, the large and increasing numbers of Latinos succeeding economically, though undocumented, in Nashville and the U.S., 3) a frequent

lack of awareness about U.S. laws that protect all residents and workers regardless of documentation status, or 4) a combination of all these.

Special Issues

- Preventive Health Care needed
- "Do not want anything for free"
- Roving service center(s)
- Information center cannot be attached to church
 - not all Latinos are Catholic
 - too much proselytization
- Center needs coherent strategic plan relevant to Latinos needs and interests (How to include corporations in this?)
- Different customs here are hard (Youth especially)
 - Also leave family, friends behind (Mental Health issue?)
- Youth – fear of failure, bad grades (Mental Health), drugs, pregnancy, special challenges in Latino community
- Very mixed opinions about gang activity (mostly second-hand, anecdotal)
- Irregular employment (homeless)
- "El derecho no cuesta mucho"
- "Al principio es difícil ambientarse"
- Mexicans are not establishing themselves here, others are (including rates of intermarriage)
- Learn from Asians (organizing)
- "En Nashville es muy difícil obtener beneficios"
- "Hay mucha soledad, no hay diversiones"
- "Hay que estar muy enfermo para que los tratan"
- "Estamos ayudando a la gente de aquí"
- "Los Latinos se ayudan sin esperar nada a cambio"
- "Lo me pidieron firmar cuando ya estaba anestesiada"
- "Vive a los EEUU por problemas de guerra en mi país; aquí vine a la guerra por sobrevivir"
- "Necesitamos hacer mas esfuerzo"
- "Venimos a trabajar, no hay tiempo para la cultura"
- "Vivimos hasta 10-15 personas en un apartamento"
- Admiro a Martin Luther King que nos unámonos todo"
- "Si, tuviéramos papeles, nos quedamos"
- "El transporte es mucho mejor en otras ciudades"
- En trabajo hay muchos Latinos, pero americanos pueden exigir sus derechos"
- "(El servicio medico) actitud de que están obligados hablar ingles"
- "Muchos latinos manejan sin licencia y les pone en riesgo legal"
- "Piden ID de los hispanos pero no los americanos"
- "Hay que pagar impuestos aunque no hay permiso para trabajar"
- "Siendo joven aquí hay muchas tentaciones, inestabilidad"

Special Themes and Insights from Discussions

- 1) Wide Variety of Latino Cultures in Nashville
 - Food, dance, music, vocabulary
 - Opportunity to better understand differences and implications (which populations more interested or able to make Nashville permanent home)
 - Non-Latinos fail to distinguish, tend to think all Mexican
 - Also Mexicans here are treated and treat themselves differently

- Discrimination among Latinos
 - Not all are Catholic or religious (implications for acculturation and outreach/information)
- 2) Roles of Men, Women and Youth
- Women tend to be as informed and outspoken as men
 - Latinas can observe the empowerment of women in U.S. (role model for youth and adults)
 - Youth have special transitional challenges (fear of failure, leave friends/family behind, pregnancy and drugs, customs, food)
 - Women speak on behalf of health, children's issues in special way (necessity, fear of law enforcement/ authorities by males)
 - Resentment over self-appointed leaders speaking on behalf of Latinos
- 3) Consensus/Leadership Void
- Older participants, long-time residents have special insights (contrast rest of U.S., Nashville and Latin America)
 - Can learn from Asian, Middle Eastern groups, leaders, issues (contrast Nashville with other U.S. cities)
 - Little consensus, community agenda, or insight form a dominant leadership contingent
- 4) Need to distinguish uniquely Latino issues from general population as appropriate
- Many issues are economic, or broad community issues (transportation, housing)
 - General previous lack of identifying what issues or parts of issues are uniquely pertinent to Latinos (documentation, variety of cultures)
- 5) Information Sources
- Emerging variety of media
 - Large community with longevity experience (more reliable network)
 - Latinos may fail to fully use what is available (3 newspapers, 2 radio stations, cable TV, community)
 - Computer access/use perceived very low (relationship to income, education)
 - Existing Latino media not universally useful (also mostly Mexican)
- 6) Ambivalence about public/private and Latino/Non-Latino resources and services
- Less concerned and acquainted about roles of government, non-profit, etc. than with affordability, quality, and fairness and fairness
 - Some existing 'services' and resources generate mixed responses
 - Poorly informed population regarding mainstream system
 - Profit motive exceeds fair service philosophy
 - Not really empowered to deliver on promises
- 7) Self-help "Empowerment" vs. "Service" model
- Hard working, opportunity-seeking not expecting significant resources – just Fairness (In return for work, taxes paid, basic human needs)
 - Unsophisticated at advocacy groups, leadership not well coalesced for priority, common issues
 - Challenge to groups like homeless (even undocumented) that are highly unempowered homeless, drug/alcohol abuse groups – ostracized by other Latinos,
 - Problems and solutions across long continuum
 - Opportunity to expand, introduce simple steps (especially in Health Care)
 - Diffuse, preventive, informative services recommended

- Hard to evaluate needs, desires across such large and growing population (not uniform approach to complex populations and needs)

8) Consciousness about Rights

- Better educated are aware of deficiencies (also proposed solutions)
- Population and workers not aware of workplace and other rights (Title VI, Labor practices) regardless of documentation

Recommendations

- 1) Accessible to all information service:
 - Accessible service
 - Free or low cost service
 - Trustworthy service delivery
 - Orientation to serve openly
 - Capability of delivering credible service and information
 - Spanish language
- 2) Need to address those services issues that are particular to Latinos (Legal Assistance, Translation, Drivers License, Worker Rights, Business Assistance)
 - Same level and quality of service as available for all special population needs
 - Diffused throughout community in meaningful way
 - Free or low cost services
 - Language accessibility essential in service delivery
 - Flexible schedule of service offerings
 - Trustworthy service delivery
 - Homeless needs a special case for service outreach

Cited for service partnership opportunities:
 Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
 United Way \

Better Business Bureau
- 3) Need to address those services issues which resemble those of total and other population groups)
 - A. Transportation system to meet life and work demands
 - Buses- Flexible, comprehensive, affordable, reliable service
 - Cars- Access to credit for purchases, opportunity to evaluate reliability and ethics of sales, contracts and repairs
 - Insurance- Access to and awareness of role of insurance regardless of language and documentation status barriers
 - B. Health Care Services to meet medical and dental needs of Latino population
 - Health care providers that offer fair, ethical, accessible, affordable care to Latinos; language accessibility essential at all levels and in all times and places
 - Dental care as with health care
 - Mental health care to address unique needs of cultural integration as well as those of any population group
 - Health insurance provided in fair, comprehensible and accessible manner; particular need to boost TennCare access
 - Homeless (drugs/alcohol, irregular work habits, abusive behaviors, other issues) to benefit from special outreach efforts due to ostracized setting within a limited empowered population group
 - C. Housing access to offer affordable, decent housing in wide variety of settings geographically and economically.

- Access to credit for home purchases and rentals.
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- 4) Dialogue and leadership development needed to strengthen pan-Latino sensibilities for issues advocacy and community dialogue
 - Organizational and support vehicles to foster understanding diversity of Latino and foreign-born in a city with “traditional” demographics and issues.
 - Few 2nd or 3rd generation Latinos in Nashville present both a challenge and opportunity to build a new integration process
 - 5) Consideration of documentation issue needed widely in community to understand Nashville’s economic realities and viable humanitarian, legal and practical responses and alternatives.
 - Federal policy and its significant local impacts require further local study and discussion
 - Advocacy as needed and appropriate to express views of community, organizations and institutions
 - Role of INS to be scrutinized locally – (service vs. enforcement role, Nashville economic realities vs. business involvement in INS enforcement, police role in INS cooperation)
 - Drivers License
 - 6) Further research and planning needed to fully understand the emerging issues, trends, opportunities and challenges of a rapidly increasing Latino population
 - Fiscal and cultural impacts of demographic and workforce changes
 - Opportunities for Latinos to be full innovative and creative participants in designing their city.
 - Understand Nashville’s experience in light of other cities with Latinos
 - Need to learn from other foreign-born groups and their experiences (Asians, Middle Eastern, others, often more ‘united’)
 - Focus groups/ Middle school – high school

English Language Groups

The English –language focus groups provided another opportunity in Encuentro Latino to understand the dynamics of change in the city's burgeoning Hispanic population. Representative various organizational sectors were convened to gain understanding of those sectors views on the Latino population's experiences locally. These groups included cross-sections of the non-profit organization community, the business sector (as employers and merchants), educators, health care providers and a variety of other population groups. The limited range of coverage was intended to involve those that have developed greater familiarity with Nashville's Latino through personal organizational interaction with that group.

The questions for the English-language groups were essentially the same as employed in the Spanish language groups except to be answered from a non-Latino perspective on Latino experiences. That is, participants were guided to respond to the following questions:

- 1) What has been good about the Latino experience in Nashville?
- 2) What has been bad about the Latino experience in Nashville?
- 3) What has been easy about the Latino experience in Nashville?
- 4) What has been hard about the Latino experience in Nashville?
- 5) What are your hopes, dreams and fears for the Latino population of Nashville and what appear to be the hopes, dreams and fears of Nashville's Latino community?
- 6) What are the links of the Latino community to one another and to countries of origin?
- 7) What are the gifts or contributions of the Latino community in Nashville?
- 8) What are your recommendations in light of the Latino community's experience in Nashville?

- 1) *What has been good about the Latino experience in Nashville?*

As with the Latino groups, the English-speaking groups had relatively few specific matters to offer as examples of good features in the Latino experience. Most prominent was an attitude that Latinos have made a good transition to the city that blends abundant jobs with a strong work ethic. Next in frequency was a related view that Nashvillians, as residents and employers, are

basically willing to learn about and accept cultural differences of Latinos as residents and workers. Several participants chided the local community to embrace this learning more forcefully and deeply. In that regard, several offered the need for native born persons, and even more for organizations, and businesses, to acquire Spanish language skills for translation and interpretation. Others, however, strongly voiced sentiment that Latinos ought to learn English to expedite their economic community integration.

Along with general attitude that the city has been welcoming to Latinos, respondents cited churches and non-profit organizations, as particular leaders in outreach, calls for greater dialogue with and learning about the Latinos population. Within these, some noted that Latinos themselves, in groups of family, friends and co-workers, have been key to implementing formal and informal adaptation. Specific instances of Spanish-speaking Latinos or natives were provided to illustrate the pivotal role such person play in the transition process for large organizations and important programs and activities.

2) *What has been bad about the Latino experience in Nashville?*

The responses to this question were substantially more numerous and detailed as a portion of the whole discussion than in the Spanish language groups where more issues were identified as “hard” than “bad” in Latino life experiences. Since participants were frequently speaking on behalf of organizations, they viewed issues not conforming to standard practices as “irregular” or “improper” than merely “difficult”.

Significant in the issue of problematic experience is the gap created in much of Latinos daily life due to a language barrier. The repercussions of this were noted prominently as “disconnects” between jobs, skills and training opportunities. Also mentioned were mixed results in integration and success of Latino students in public schools due to communications obstacles for students, teachers and parents with perceived limited opportunities for English language classes was closely tied to this challenge.

Other frequently cited and strongly worded comments reflected on reporting of the mass media that has highlighted problem issues of Latinos in Nashville without as robustly presenting

the positive contributions made by Latinos and their culture, their economic contributions and the values and lives of the majority of Latinos.

Overcrowded housing conditions for Latinos was also notably discussed among the English-language groups. This issue, as with some others, seemed to rise in prominence in the focus groups since many participants had close knowledge of life conditions and challenges for many Latinos as an important vehicle for sharing these matters with a mainstream audience. Significantly, as well, English-language groups in some issues were clearly better placed to make comparisons with conditions of life for non-Latinos and to know legal and ethical standards within the U.S. system than at least some portion of the local Latino population.

Slightly less discussion, although still substantial, focused on the Latino culture's treatment of household financial matters. With complexities of documentation concerns, language barriers with local financial institutions and Latinos own strong ties to countries of origin, the Latino ability and/or desire to save and invest money and to establish credit is significantly diminished. The implications are quite circular, then, for other life challenges – buying a vehicle or home, renting a home, and building equity and familiarity with local mainstream institutions.

Lastly, a limited, but very concerned, discussion ran through the English-language groups around the issues of Latino fear of authority, encounters with discrimination and failure to get needed or access to health care and child care. Again, those participants placed in settings close to these issues frequently stressed their strong concern and desire to further educate and inform both parties Latino and non-Latino, about rights and obligations. Just as Latinos ought not to live in fear of authority, with implications for not reporting crime or seeking necessary assistance, so should mainstream institutions expect Latinos to know and honor laws and practices applicable to everyone (leading of course, to a need for more language accessible orientation and transition to integration for Latinos).

3) *What has been easy about the Latino experience in Nashville?*

The thoughts offered by the English language groups rather closely conformed to those

in the Spanish-language groups. Respondents noted particularly that Nashville is an “accepting” city although it may not yet fully understand nuances of the Latino experience or the integration process. Some felt the latter was still rather severely absent. Non-Latinos, as well, seem quite aware that the informal network of family and friends of Latino is important to newcomers. From the mainstream’s perspective however, some noted that this becomes a convenient opportunity for mainstream organizations, institutions, employers and others to delay or avoid their own proactive responsibilities in the integration and transition of Latinos.

Lastly, several, representing both the public and the private sector, felt that the climate of employment opportunity and relations of Latinos to employers and other workers was positive. This observation, overall, seemed at odds at least with incidents of employer and co-worker discrimination against Latinos that the Spanish-language groups closely coupled with a shared view that economic opportunity in general is quite good for Nashville’s Latino workforce.

4) What has been hard about the Latino experience in Nashville?

Clearly the challenges of Latino experience were made from the mainstream perspective within the English-language groups. Language barriers and cultural differences were extensively described as hindrances to more rapid integration of Latinos. While many recognized the need for greater availability of relevant, accessible and affordable English language training for Latinos, relatively few participants countered with a desire or need for mainstream organizations and firms to learn Spanish.

Another issue of much discussions was lack of documentation by many Latinos and the many difficulties presented for employers and service organizations to effectively reconcile legal responsibilities, economic and moral concerns and desires to be more informed and active advocates for changes and responses helpful to Latinos and the city overall.

Lastly, transportation was mentioned often as a hardship in Latino life in the city, although again as observed by employers or others relying on accessibility to and by Latinos. Interestingly, the pervasiveness of this area of discussion very likely exceeded in general terms, any other topic, although it typically received comments of resignation or disdain as opposed to

very strong feelings and comments around such matters as documentation, perceived discrimination, and perceived irregular practices in language access to services.

Survey

The third major phase of Encuentro Latino is the general population survey. A test period for the instrument and the methodology has occurred during the time that the focus groups were underway. Important progress has been made in understanding and meeting the challenges of properly gaining representative information about Nashville's Latino population. Among the challenges has been the relative lack of current U.S. Census data on characteristics of the local Latino population, the complexities of translated survey administration, the issue of documentation concerns of many potential participants, and the evolving consensus about the most necessary and desirable areas of inquiry into the Latino experience.

After release of findings from the focus groups, renewed work will begin to conduct and complete the questionnaire survey. Members of the project Steering Committee as well as other local research institutions will review a narrative of the final survey instrument and methodology chosen. Funded questionnaire administrators are anticipated, distribution will be strongest in geographic areas of Latino population cluster. Data collected will lastly be shared among the collaborating agencies of Encuentro Latino as well as made accessible to the public via the website of United Way of Metropolitan Nashville and other organizations.