

A SUMMARY REPORT



Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment Project

Latino population growth in Wisconsin increased by 107% from 1990 to 2000. Five south central counties (Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, Rock and Walworth) saw growth that was even more dramatic. Increases in Latino populations in these counties ranged from 140% to 239%.

Latinos come to Wisconsin primarily for economic reasons—to seek work, higher-paying jobs and financial stability. Their occupations range from unskilled labor to professions that require higher education or a license in the United States or their countries of origin.

The second reason Latinos give for immigrating to Wisconsin is to join family members already living in the state or to get settled before other family members join them. Latinos also immigrate for educational opportunities, to live in safer communities and to obtain a better quality of life.

The Wisconsin Five-County Assessment project that is the subject of this publication began as an opportunity to engage the research expertise of the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater and the University of Wisconsin–Cooperative Extension county offices. Extension agents in Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, Rock and Walworth counties had previously established contacts with the growing Latino population.

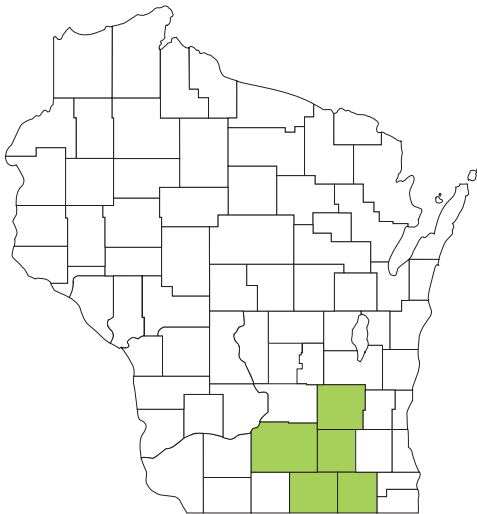
These five counties represent a mix of farmlands and rural townships, small towns and growing cities. Services for the Latino population vary from city to city and county to county and are representative of services available throughout the state. Some counties offered a choice of centralized community services while others scrambled to find translators to meet critical legal and medical needs.

The Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment Project was designed to give UW-Extension a better understanding of Latinos' experiences in Wisconsin. This included examining the current services or programs designed to meet the needs of the Latino population, the barriers to effective services, and the programs and overall improvements that would be most beneficial. This study of 156 people from diverse backgrounds represented the broad Latino population within Wisconsin as well as community service providers. (See *About the Study* for more details.)

What's working well?

Latino group participants recognized and valued a number of services and programs that help them economically. Government subsidized programs such as medical assistance, the women's, Infants' and Childrens' Supplemental Nutrition program (WIC), public health and Head Start programs, as well as some private non-profit organizations were identified as being helpful. Employment and training programs are helpful. Support for Latino children's educational needs and opportunities to learn English were appreciated.

The community service provider groups identified additional services and understood the specific requirements of programs. Many Latinos were unable to differentiate the specifics of each program or to navigate the system. Identifying and communicating the differences in programs and streamlining access to them would benefit Latinos.



South central counties participating in the project included Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, Rock and Walworth counties.

The community service providers also work on the process of developing relationships and services through coalition-building and networking. Collaborating to take advantage of limited resources and improve communication was seen as important. Some community service providers are also seeking to improve cultural understanding in addition to ensuring equitable services.

... another barrier is that sometimes these programs for Hispanics are designed by Anglos who focus more on getting the language communication in place and don't devote enough time to the other issues of culture that need to be part of making someone feel comfortable in that setting."

—Community service provider

Barriers

Many of the barriers Latinos face are represented in this pyramid model, similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. One cannot fully achieve or meet needs toward the top of the pyramid without meeting those at the lower levels first.

This hierarchy is not unique to Latino culture. The pyramid illustrates similar frustrations faced by all low-income people within the United States. The first level—the need for documentation—distinguishes the Latino immigrant population and possibly other immigrant cultures with lower-income groups.

Documentation, discrimination, language and literacy barriers were so interconnected that separating their impact was nearly impossible.

Documentation

At the most basic level, Latino immigrants must first obtain documentation—a green card or United States citizenship—to live and work comfortably and without fear in the United States without exploitation.

They also got me one day for speeding and, when I gave him my license, he asked me if I was sure my license was valid . . . as if saying maybe it was fake. And I told him, 'Yes, it is good.' He asked me, 'Are you sure?'"

—Latino participant

Language and literacy

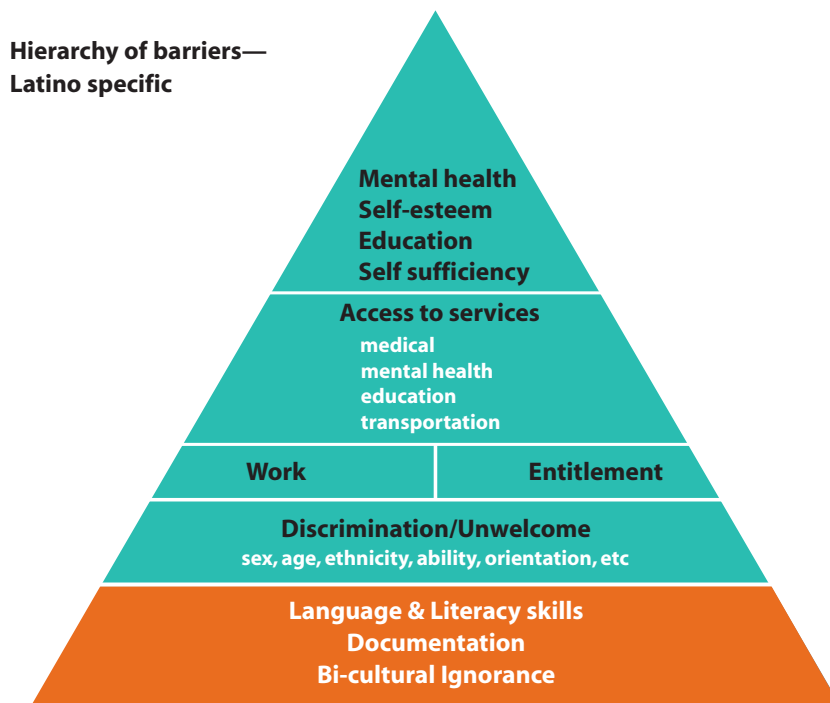
Many Latinos are long-time residents and are not faced with language and literacy concerns. Immigrant Latinos try to improve their English language skills for more job and social opportunities. Years of practice and study are required to become fluent in a second language as an adult.

In addition, participants referenced low or limited Spanish literacy as a barrier to English literacy, job and other opportunities.

Without the appropriate documentation and education, Latinos face a brick wall. Reaching their personal and economic goals becomes nearly impossible in the United States.

Some individuals and families slip through the fence with a fake social security number, an employer who looks the other way or a temporary job. Although initially seen as an opportunity, the fear of being discovered as an undocumented worker keeps some Latinos in dead end jobs, barely able to purchase necessities for their families.

That same fear silences complaints about unjust treatment in the workplace. If a worker does not receive overtime pay for working longer hours or is overlooked when better hours are available, speaking up might endanger a job or even a Latino's ability to stay in the United States.



Too many of the jobs available do not offer benefits or pay a living wage, making the American “dream” of equality and economic success unachievable for some Latinos.

Discrimination, real or perceived, dots the entire pyramid. Examples of discrimination, racism, and unfair treatment were given throughout the focus group discussions. Examples included being ignored in restaurants and getting stares while speaking in Spanish. Discrimination was also reported in specific categories such as work and workers’ rights, health care, housing, children’s welfare and religious affiliation.

Latinos were disappointed, but willing to admit that discrimination existed among themselves; for example, in a perceived unwillingness to help other Latinos and work together for a common cause.

Some Latinos set aside the discrimination and are determined to seek better job opportunities. The difficulty of transferring professional credentials from their countries of origin and lack of fluent English keeps some Latinos underemployed and limits opportunities for advancement.

Entitlement programs and other community resources offer opportunities for Latinos to finally meet their families’ basic needs. Affordable healthcare, educational opportunities and affordable housing can lead to the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency. Many low-income families also share additional challenges that need to be resolved as they work toward financial independence—childcare, transportation and concern about their children’s healthy development and safety. They need access to mental health resources and tools to build positive self-esteem for themselves and their families.

The entire pyramid is encircled by a pervasive cultural ignorance. Both Anglo and Latino cultures are comprised of many cultural elements. It is not uncommon for members of both cultures to be unaware of customs or values taken for granted by the other.

For example, Anglo culture regards time as a valuable commodity. Anglo-Americans might view it as irresponsible or discourteous to be late for an appointment. Latinos place a higher value on relationships and would consider it rude and disrespectful to leave a friend or acquaintance in the middle of a conversation—even if remaining results in being late for another commitment.

Anglo-Americans value independence and individualism. Americans expect their children to be independent, to begin their own nuclear families, and to work toward supporting themselves financially. Within traditional Latino cultures, the extended family and the pueblo community are central to the development of relationships. Resources are typically shared more freely.

“... I think I would need an organization that I would feel protects me, orients me, and helps me to reach my objective, because right now, if I want to reach it, I am alone. I can’t achieve it.”

—Latino participant

Anglo-Americans need more opportunities to learn about and be sensitive to Latino cultures, which vary from country to country. To be most useful, services and programs for Latinos must reflect an understanding of Latino cultures.

Latino immigrants also want more opportunities to learn about laws and values in the United States. Schools, legal systems and dominant cultural values of Spanish-speaking countries differ from those of the United States.

In spite of years of hard work, without proper documentation and English language skills, Latinos are offered few educational and economic opportunities. The American dream will be saved for their children.

Breaking barriers

According to community service providers and Latino participants the following suggestions could help to break down some barriers:

- Improving access to language and literacy education.
- More frequent use of translators in community settings.
- Better access to health care and health insurance.
- Increasing basic education and job skills.
- More opportunities for Latino youth to become involved in community activities and gain access to affordable higher education.
- Establishing community centers that offer bilingual and bi-cultural services.
- Providing cross-cultural training on Anglo-American and Latino culture.
- Improving transportation and housing availability and affordability.
- Developing educational programs on immigration status, documentation and employment for Latino workers, employers and community members.
- Extending networks of communication among community service providers to maximize existing resources.

Overall improvements needed

Both the Latino groups and the community service providers felt that working together would be the best way to solve community issues. A desire to work toward a multi-cultural community while retaining individual identities was expressed.

Health care and insurance

The need for available, affordable and culturally appropriate health and mental health care is an enormous issue. It is challenging when jobs do not offer insurance benefits and often workers do not qualify for medical assistance. Even a sliding fee for health services is too expensive and forces some families to rely on emergency room visits for necessary medical care.

Additional barriers included not having health services in Spanish, unequal treatment by doctors and nurses, and the lack of mental health services. Without access to quality affordable health care, Latinos face the possibility that untreated health concerns can escalate into life-threatening situations.

Language and literacy

The inability to communicate fluently in English puts many recent Latino immigrants at a disadvantage. A lack of interpreters and lack of training in English are cited as problems related to language and literacy. Many Latino families have complicated schedules, long and odd work hours, child care and transportation issues that make it difficult to attend English classes regularly or sometimes at all. Translated materials and bilingual service providers can bridge that gap—but only provide the beginning of assistance.

“I also think a lot of employers take advantage of the situation where they pay the people who don’t speak English a lot less than they would normally pay them, because they know that they probably don’t have documents.”

—Community service provider

Educational opportunities

A desire for additional education for self-improvement and to obtain a better job is hampered by the cost and limited opportunities. Job training is not generally available for entry-level positions. Most training requires an understanding of general English as well as job-specific or technical language.

Documentation

Lack of documentation of citizenship or residency status is by itself a barrier and responsible for a number of related concerns. Community service providers observe employment difficulties, doors closing to higher education and drivers’ licenses, unfair medical practices, difficult or impossible banking, and housing discrimination when Latinos do not have the legal documents needed for services. Community service providers express frustration with the extensive requirements needed to satisfy the strict immigration laws, social security requirements and the unfair treatment Latinos receive if they do not have the appropriate documentation.

Latino community centers

In communities and counties that do not have service centers or community centers, participants indicated a need for a centralized agency to provide support, break down cultural barriers and offer activities or inexpensive services. A “center” did not necessarily mean a building, but rather a “point person” or people who had accurate, recent and consistent information about local and statewide services, practices and policies.

Workers’ rights

Employment, although recognized by Latinos as better in the United States, failed to offer job security. Employers failed to honor workers’ rights and discriminated against or exploited Latino employees. Little information was shared with Latinos.

Cultural appreciation

Community service providers in most counties identified cultural sensitivity as among the most important issues raised.

Youth programs

Family responsibilities and lack of transportation often exclude Latino youth from participating in after-school activities. Specific programs are needed to encourage Latino youth participation, remove barriers and educate parents about the value of such programs. Removing eligibility barriers to higher educational opportunities is needed for undocumented children of immigrants. Children of undocumented parents born in the U.S. are automatically American citizens and need the same access to affordable in-state tuition fees to make higher education accessible.

Transportation

Depending on the community, more public transportation is needed to provide access to resources and jobs.

Law enforcement

Participants perceived discrimination by law enforcement agencies in terms of ticket citations and a general lack of trust between Latinos and law enforcement officials.

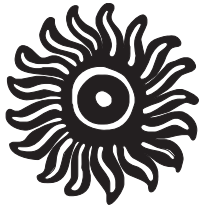
Childcare

Accessible and affordable childcare is desired. High quality centers, bilingual teachers and subsidized or low-cost centers are key elements. Latino participants want childcare centers to include children of all cultures.

Housing

A need for better quality housing, equity in housing programs and more affordable housing exists in most communities.

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Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment Project

UW
Extension

About the study¹

The Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment Project was designed collaboratively with five counties in south central Wisconsin. The focus group format was chosen because it is a research method that: a) emphasizes participants' perspectives; b) encourages the development and exploration of perspectives through dialogue between participants; and c) provides a way to gather information from people whose written skills in English might be limited. Focus groups are also recommended for exploring new topics (Morgan, 1997). The study was intended to create opportunities for making new contacts and connections and begin valuable networking for later UWEX services and programs.

This study, built on previous studies from around the country and in Wisconsin, was designed to identify the needs of area Latinos. A research consultant experienced in qualitative research (e.g., focus group designs) reviewed previous studies and designed this study to increase the likelihood that the results would accurately and credibly assess the needs intended (internal validity), be reasonably consistent over time, place and person (reliability), and generalize to the needs of others not involved in the study (external validity; see Kirk & Miller, 1986, for reliability and validity in qualitative research).

Additional design elements included enhancing the sampling procedures, the interview procedures and the data analyses, as well as augmenting the concept of community-building. For example, by adding a final consolidation question, participants themselves began the analysis process, which further increased their voice and presence in the results (Poorman, 2002). In fact, all design decisions were intended to maintain accuracy, consistency and generalizability while amplifying participant voices.

Interview questions for Latino participant group

- **What brought you to this county?**
- **What's working well here for you/your family?**
- **What barriers have you encountered since coming to this county?**
- **What would make your life and your family's life better?**
- **What training or educational programs would you like to have that you haven't found?**
- **What else should we know about your experiences here?**
- **Consolidation question: What are the five to ten most important ideas generated during this interview?**

Interview questions for community service provider group

- **What is your organization currently doing to meet the needs of Latinos in your community? In your organization?**
- **What's working well for Latinos in your community? In your organization?**
- **What barriers/challenges do you think Latino families encounter in your community? In your organization?**
- **What sorts of challenges have you/your organization faced in meeting the needs of Latinos in your community? In your organization?**
- **What needs of Latinos aren't being met in your community? In your organization?**
- **What else should we know about your experiences?**
- **Consolidation question: What are the five to ten most important ideas generated during this interview?**

From March through May 2003, UWEX educators invited Latinos and community service providers to attend one of the 15 focus group interviews, three in each of the five counties—Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, Rock and Walworth.

Each county hosted two groups for Latino participants and one for community service providers. The group interviews gave people the opportunity to talk about their experiences and voice their opinions. We purposefully recruited multi-generational participants, both recent and long-term immigrants, and native Wisconsin Latinos as well as community service providers from a variety of agencies and businesses. The 156 participants in the study constituted key community stakeholders. Anonymity was assured to all participants.

Every effort was made to create a comfortable, supportive environment for the interviews. Childcare, meals and sometimes transportation allowed all participants to attend the interviews. Participants were compensated with a \$20 gift certificate from a local grocery or discount store, which they could donate if they wished. Bilingual facilitators, one male and two female, conducted the focus group interviews; the two facilitators whose first language is Spanish conducted the two Latino participant focus groups. The interview questions, documents (such as invitation letters and consent forms), and scripts were developed in English, translated into Spanish, and then translated back to make sure they were accurate.

The facilitators had previous experience in interviewing and received additional training in research ethics, research interviewing and crisis intervention. To amplify the participants' perspectives, facilitators used an approach with as little facilitator involvement as possible. Facilitators ask and repeat the preset research questions and paraphrase responses without interpreting or judging the participants' responses. They encourage dialogue

among participants by listening carefully and staying silent, as well as through techniques like repeating the questions, paraphrasing, writing responses on easel sheets and by quietly asking “What else?” or “Other ideas?” This approach also facilitates connections between participant responses and draws out people who tend to speak less frequently.

“These are my words.”

—ending phrase often used by Latino participants from all five counties to close their comments during the interviews

The 90-minute interviews were recorded and later translated into English (as necessary) and transcribed verbatim. The UWEX educators, research consultant and facilitators analyzed information from all 15 interview transcripts. The transcripts were broken down into statements and the statements were then grouped into themes. The themes were evaluated to make sure they accurately captured the meaning and importance of people’s perspectives. This was achieved by referring back to the context in which the statement was made using the transcripts, the facilitators’ understanding of the meaning, the easel sheets prepared during the interview, and the final consolidation responses. The facilitators, research consultant, and UWEX educators analyzed themes and contexts, themes and meanings, statements and themes again and again. This same process was used to analyze information from the three interviews conducted in each of the counties. This study was approved by the UW-Whitewater Institutional Review Board in January, 2003.

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Shelby Maier, UW-Extension Walworth County family living educator

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¹ See *Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment Project Executive Summary* (January 2004) for more detail about the study design or contact Paula B. Poorman, Ph.D., Associate Professor at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (608/231-2249).