Outreach to Latino American Communities
A guide for Latino Americans: 500 Years of History grantees
By Neyda Martinez, neyda.martinez@gmail.com, cell: 917-656-7846

Depending on the size, scope and goals of your Latino Americans: 500 Years of History (LA500) programming, reaching out to the Latino community doesn’t have to entail a significant amount of funding or staffing. It is, however, greatly valued when Latino outreach and engagement is personal, intentional and conducted with an eye toward long-term cultivation.

A strong outreach plan focuses on relationship-building — fostering long-term trust and loyalty — rather than on short-term initiatives or one-time events. Successful outreach and audience cultivation can be achieved by inviting Latinos in your community to be part of your ongoing programmatic offerings and activities over time.

A goal of relationship-building is to create strong, even emotional connections to your organization that can lead to repeat engagement, free word-of-mouth promotion and an exchange of information that can help your organization learn more deeply about your community and its needs.

This guide will walk you through some of the steps involved with conducting outreach and planning your LA500 events. Topics will include:

- Setting outreach goals
- Researching Latino organizations in your area and preparing for outreach
- Making contact and getting referrals
- Conducting media outreach (see Spanish press materials posted on the LA500 website)
- Hosting events
  - Goals for screening events
  - Translation
  - Event logistics to consider
  - Resources for moderators, presenters and panelists
  - Facilitating and managing group dynamics
  - Thinking about next steps

This sustained commitment can help engage a new cadre of Latino participation for increased engagement as volunteers, docents, possible board development and even the cultivation of local Latino-owned businesses as potential support sources.
Set outreach goals

When it comes to setting your outreach goals, consider: What are some realistic objectives you can set with your partners? What do you want to happen as a result of your event?

Ask yourself: Who is my target audience? How can I find/reach them? Am I targeting Latino youth, seniors, ministries and faith-based organizations? Before beginning your outreach campaign, spend some time thinking about whom you would like to reach with your programming.

Research Latino organizations in your area and prepare for outreach

Typically, in any city, market or region, there are arrays of government, academic/cultural and nonprofit social service organizations that serve the Hispanic community. These institutions are your starting point for outreach to Latinos.

Local colleges and universities frequently have established networks that you may tap into. Liaise with their office of admissions, student life and campus affairs office, or Latino student organizations. Contact influential professors and advisors.

Make contact and get referrals

When it comes to making connections and forging new relationships, where do you begin? How? First, think about your personal, academic and professional networks. Do they include any Latino persons that you may have already liaised with? If so, reach out to them with a phone call and follow up with a friendly and professional note outlining your organization’s mission/commitment and your LA500 programming. Try to meet them in person for coffee or, at the very least, schedule a phone call with them to brainstorm a list of prospects with you. Ask them if they would serve as your ambassador. Would they have the time to facilitate the introduction? If not, can you use their name?

In the alternative, you may have to conduct some community research and will have to make the “cold call” yourself. Don’t fret. Cold calling is part of “doing business.” However, be prepared with your compelling and succinct introduction. Write a short script and practice beforehand until you feel comfortable and fluid with your pitch. Introduce them to you, your organization and its mission/purpose/role in the community as well as your plans for LA500. Invite them for a site visit or ask them if you could come meet them for a brief chat over breakfast, lunch, coffee or tea. In-person discussions give you the opportunity to connect on a human, professional and emotional level.

Once the rapport is establish and the parties are clear about your plans and goals, ask them for referrals and their best advice for reaching out to the Latino community. Would they share leads/contacts and brainstorm with you? Would they facilitate and make the introduction? Would they include your event and email on their website?
As in any relationship, maintain good and clear communication. Thank them for their help via phone and in writing. Invite them to the event. Acknowledge them when, where and how you deem appropriate – e.g. from the dais if they’ve become a “supporting partner” or in person when you introduce them to your guest speakers, fellow co-workers or other community members. Continue to invite them and keep them apprised of your organization and its ongoing work, opportunities and events. Be prepared and inclined to visit with them and accept their invitations to community events as well.

As with any new relationship, be kind and patient with your new friend(s). Manage your expectations. Listen and learn about their working conditions, constraints and successes. Be positive and welcoming. Over time, these new relationships can and will bear fruit.

**Collaborate on community projects**

Collaboration and working together is a wonderful way to build trust, learn other organizations’ working styles and understand their “bandwidth” or constraints.

A partnership or collaboration can take many forms. Often, it is best to start simply. For example, commit to cross-promotion (e.g. via email, with flyers on site and social media). This builds good will and enthusiasm. It promotes the desire for a mutually beneficial relationship and sets the stage for more.

Think about what assets you have that are no- or low-cost and could be a huge help or resource to your community partner. Do you have free rooms that could house a meeting or informal gathering? What other in-kind support or assets can you share that would be valuable to a community partner?

Are you ready to take your relationship to the next level?

If timing, vision and purpose align you could co-present an event at their site, your site or even an off-site location. This works well when an event or program is free to the public. However, this type of partnership begins to create a risk and reward scenario. Think deeply about the partnership. What do you want? What do you need? Whether it is time or financial support, how much can you invest in the project?

If the organization is informal or small, it can be off-putting to present it with a dense legal document outlining the terms of the partnership. But a friendlier shared memorandum, created together as a result of rich discussion and mutual goals, can outline what each party will bring to the table and deadlines for these goals. It is always helpful to talk upfront about resources and expectations.

As in life, not all relationships are 50/50. Think deeply about the “why’s” and “how’s” beforehand. What would a worst-case scenario look like to you and your organization? If something unforeseen happens, such as a personnel change or declined sponsorship request,
can you and will you ensure the program will move forward? Are you prepared to pitch in and do the extra work? Or, do you have time to cancel or reschedule without ruffling any feathers or disappointing community members? What impact would that have on your organization’s impression/influence in the community?

Think about other creative collaborations that are a win-win, such as community surveys, where findings would help both of your organizations serve the community better. How about the possibility of bartering space or services? For example, what could you offer in exchange for free translation services?

**Conduct outreach to the media**

The media — particularly Spanish-language media — can play an important role in your outreach. Obtaining media coverage takes work, but it is cost-free and can give you an invaluable access to the Latino community.

- Contact local Spanish newspapers and/or media outlets. Each LA500 event gives you an opportunity to create local news about your organization and initiative. Ask reporters to attend your event or review the film. Pitch the value of this unique screening and the importance of encouraging dialogue around contemporary social issues. If reporters cannot attend but would like to obtain copies of the documentary, you may refer them to the online video section of the [PBS LATINO AMERICANS website](https://www.pbs.org/latinoamericans/).

- Consider partnering with your local public television station on events, or ask them to help promote your event

- **TIP:** The [National Association of Hispanic Journalists](https://www.nahj.org/) comprises professional journalists and college students, and it has chapters across the U.S. Peruse the site for a professional or student chapter in your area to find potential panelists/contributors and to explore local coverage within the Hispanic community.

- Please note that all press materials, invitations and website listings should include the LA500 sponsor credits.

**Host events**

*Goals for screening events*

The LATINO AMERICANS documentaries can be used to present information, get people interested in shared learning, provide opportunities for people from different groups with unique perspectives to exchange views, share histories and create spaces for reflection and dialogue.
Possible event goals may include:

- Forming new community ties and organizational alliances
- Making new contacts with the media and becoming a resource to be consulted
- Recruiting new members and participants through increased visibility
- Enhancing your educational offerings for students, staff and/or volunteers
- Advancing the humanities in public life through an experience of shared community learning and discussion

These engagement and learning events are intended to add to a person’s knowledge and to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of culture, identity and history — not to change a person’s fundamental belief system. Being clear about your objectives will make it easier to decide how to structure, promote and measure — qualitatively or quantitatively — the outcome of the event. Simply put, you are offering an opportunity for community building and conversation, not confrontation.

Your director, curator, coordinator or coordinating team can identify a facilitator, moderator and/or speakers. Think about choosing people who are familiar with the issues and can create a friendly environment for open discussion and generate meaningful dialogue about the issues raised by the film. If you need to find someone from outside of your organization to facilitate, university professors, human resource professionals, clergy and youth leaders may be good candidates.

As you’re planning your events, consider these questions:

- Will we host a single meeting or event, or a series of activities?
- Can publicity help us “get the word out” (advance promotion), or can it help validate our work (a thoughtful report or article about the event)?
- How will you measure and evaluate your results?
  - Surveys/evaluation forms for event attendees
  - Attendance numbers
  - Numbers of new participants
  - Commitment for ongoing support
  - Invitation(s) to further engage with the target community
- Does the way I am planning to structure the event fit my organization’s objectives?
- Do I need an outside facilitator, translator or sign language interpreter?
- Are there local experts on the topic who should be present or participate?
- What is the desired audience size? Keep in mind that large groups are appropriate for information exchanges, while small groups allow for more dialogue and feedback.
- Have I arranged to involve all stakeholders? How? Think about contacting other community organizations, public officials or experts who might be good speakers or project advisors.
Do I have a well-rounded group of presenters to ensure that various perspectives, points of view and diverse identities are represented?

Translation

What are your community’s language needs? While many Latinos are bilingual with varied degrees of proficiency, in some communities and families Spanish is the primary language. Approximately 33.2 million Hispanics in the U.S. speak English proficiently, according to a 2014 analysis conducted by the Pew Research Center. The same report notes that while the number of proficient English-speaking Latinos has increased, the share that speaks Spanish at home has declined over the past 13 years.

Consider your own community. Will your program and audience require a translator? If so, how will this impact the depth and scope of the discussion, as time must be allocated for translation? Who will translate — a local teacher/professor/educator or a parent? Will their participation be volunteer or paid?

Remember, the PBS LATINO AMERICANS website is offered in both English and Spanish. Episodes and video segments can also be viewed in either language.

Event logistics to consider

• Does the physical layout of the event space allow for the kind of discussion you hope to have? If you are bringing together different constituencies, we recommend a host space that is accepted as neutral territory.
• In terms of the actual size of the event and the group, if the group is large, are there plans to break into smaller groups? Or should attendance be limited?
• Plan for comfortable seating arrangement; ensure all locations have good sightlines.
• Is the event being held in a space where all participants will feel comfortable?
• Is the space wheelchair accessible?
• Is it in a part of town that’s easy to reach by various kinds of transportation? Is the public transportation safe and does it get attendees to the destination in a timely manner?
• Is parking free or expensive? Could you offer parking vouchers/waivers?
• Should there be a separate room nearby for babysitters? What is the accepted age range?
• If you have a newsletter or listserv, pass around an email sign-up sheet at the event.
• Don’t forget to do a head count.
• In case of a health emergency, make sure your assigned monitor has a charged phone handy to make calls immediately.
• Equipment and tech check: Before the event, conduct a tech check and watch the film 24 hours in advance on the equipment you will be using on the day of your event. This will give you ample time to resolve any issue that might arise.
• You may want to assign certain members of your planning team to take photos and create content for a short blog post and social media follow-up.

Resources for moderators, presenters and panelists

In preparation for your event, participants may benefit from visiting the LATINO AMERICANS resources created by PBS, NEH and ALA.

• Historical timeline
• Blog contributions
• Lesson plans

Program execution: A short checklist

• Ensure facilities are suitable and welcoming to your audience.
• Make sure all A/V equipment is working properly
• Go over discussion points with your facilitator and panelists.
• Take photos during your event for future fliers and social media posts.
• Pass out audience evaluation forms.
• Encourage additional individual learning via PBS LATINO AMERICANS online content.
• Before the event, identify your own hot-button issues. With the facilitators and organizers, view the film before the event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren’t dealing with emotions and trying to facilitate a discussion at the same time.
• Be knowledgeable. You don’t need to be an expert on the issues, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements.
• Refer to the LATINO AMERICANS lesson plans and website to review the background information.
• Be clear about your role(s).

Facilitating and managing group dynamics

You may find yourself taking on several roles for a single event, including host, organizer — even projectionist. If you are plan to serve as a facilitator, be sure to focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion. Keep in mind that a facilitator remains neutral and helps move the discussion along without imposing his or her views on the dialogue.

Issues can play out very differently with different groups of people depending on what issues the community may be dealing with. Will the issue being discussed be new to some, or have the members of the group dealt with it or lived through the experience before? Your outreach may attract a diverse group from varied geographic locations, ages, races, religions and
socioeconomic classes. This will create a dynamic in the room and can have an impact on comfort levels. People bring their histories and prior knowledge into the room. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point of view.

If you are hosting a public discussion, consider how well group members know one another. If you are bringing together people who have never met, you may want to devote some time to introductions at the beginning of the event. Agree to ground rules regarding language and comments. Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect. Typically, such rules include refraining from profane or offensive language, as well as asking participants to speak in the first person (“I think . . .”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that . . .”).

Try to give everyone an opportunity to be heard. Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion. If needed, the facilitator can intervene and briefly remind the audience about the difference between dialogue and debate. Encourage active listening. This will be especially important in preventing a discussion from dissolving into a repetitive, rhetorical, political or religious debate.

Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for statements/views that challenge as well as reinforce their own knowledge and ideas. Everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film they have just seen, and each of them may be accurate. It can help people understand one another’s perspectives if, in addition to sharing their views, speakers identify the evidence on which they base their opinions.

If the intensity level rises, pause. You might also consider providing a safe space for participants to “vent,” perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. Think carefully about what you ask people to share publicly, and explain things like confidentiality and whether or not press will be present.

Think about the nature of the discussion and population deeply. Can your organization ensure that the security guard will be paid? Should you hire off-duty police officers?

Remember that controversial topics give rise to deep emotions and the expression of strongly held beliefs, but they often make for excellent discussions. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere in which people feel safe, encouraged and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share their experiences, knowledge and personal or family history.

Thinking about next steps

Make the most of the learning experience and, at the conclusion, ask for audience feedback and evaluations. This may be elicited through a set of closing remarks or by disseminating a short set of questions. Feedback may be useful for any future reports to funders and will
continue to add to your organization’s knowledge bank. It can also help you think about how to connect in the future with this audience by aligning your programming to the community’s needs and desires.

Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling heard, valued, energized and optimistic — even if the discussion has been an intense one. Action steps may be important for people who already have a good deal of experience talking about the issues on the table. For those who are new to the issues, the experience of public speaking and engaging in a public discussion may serve as their action step.

In the event “next steps” are real and conceivable, is that an aspect of the activity you wish to continue to lead? Perhaps you will continue to be a part of the action, but not lead it? Think deeply with your organizers about any potential outcomes of your event and know what role you may want to play in any coalition or activity that may arise as a result of your event.

**Good luck!**

Remember, relationship building takes time and effort. Welcome and embrace the opportunity to be truly embedded in your community, authentically and intentionally.

Don’t overwhelm your staff but do make a commitment. Intentional outreach through your LA500 programming can increase civic engagement and public education on issues affecting the collective well-being of families and communities. Participants engaged in program development and/or information dissemination can help build Latino coalitions.