

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Latinos and Latinas in the South ***A Report Prepared for the Southern Arts Federation***

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The well-documented increase in the population of the American South signals a shift that compels anyone involved in cultural and arts programming to look at the status of Latinos and their cultural influence and production. The United States faces challenges and opportunities similar to those faced at the beginning of the 20th century, when the country's population dramatically changed due to the immigrant population coming from Europe and the Americas.

A 1999 report for the Tennessee Arts Commission stated that "The Latino population in the state (Tennessee), mostly of Mexican origin, have brought with them a large repertoire of artistic traditions" (Cantú). The same can be said for the other areas of the South. The need to document and develop ways to serve the Latino community in the region is what prompted the Southern Arts Federation (SAF), a private non-profit regional arts organization in Atlanta, Georgia, to implement this project: a preliminary survey conducted through questionnaires and focus group meetings held during March 2003 in four locations in the South, concluding in a bilingual report.

The broad goal of the project was to assess the cultural resources present in the Latino communities in SAF's partner states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee), assess community needs, and insure that SAF is fulfilling its mission in the region for all its constituencies. A series of questions helped to assess critical areas: the extent of existing assets, the obstacles to cultural activity in the region, and the establishment of short term and long-range goals for the Latino community's cultural activity. Dr. Cantú and SAF staff visited four communities and met with various community groups composed of artists, folklorists, cultural workers and others interested in working with the Latino community.

The specific project objectives were as follows:

- ◆ To meet with a representative group of Latino artists and cultural workers in four communities: Dalton, Georgia; New Orleans, Louisiana; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Winter Park, Florida.
- ◆ To meet with public sector folklorists and other coordinators of arts and cultural arts services to the Latino community.
- ◆ To establish networks that will result in more direct services from SAF to the targeted group, i.e. Latino cultural centers, organizations and artists.

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At every location, the discussions centered around three major questions:

- ◆ What are the current services and resources available to the Latino community?
- ◆ What does the Latino community dream of having in terms of cultural and artistic activity?
- ◆ What are the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving such dreams?

Goals and objectives were decided through consideration of SAF's mission, what other states had done in surveying similar community needs, and in consulting with cultural workers in the region to determine what was needed. Prior public sector folklife work with Latino communities in the South was reviewed. Folklorists who are working in other areas outside of the four states we visited were also consulted.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The increase in Latino populations in the South demands attention to services and basic needs that must be met within communities. Unfortunately, the traditional arts and cultural expressions are often neglected and not taken into account when needs assessments are conducted. While basic community needs (housing, health, education) are extremely important, we must acknowledge and consider the manner in which cultural expression intersects with the service needs of the community. Building much needed bridges between existing social service resources, faith-based organizations, and Latino community leaders is central to the success of any endeavor.

The following recommendations are based on similar research and the community meetings for this project. Although each of the four states and individual communities have particular desires that require specific actions, there are generalized needs within the South's Latino communities. Recommendations fall into three general categories that correspond to the individual sites and general regional concerns:

- ◆ Linguistic and educational support
- ◆ Infrastructure support that includes physical space and venues
- ◆ Technical assistance and professional development for individual and groups of artists, cultural and social service workers

Linguistic and Educational Needs

The most salient need is for translated materials at all levels. If the newly arrived Spanish speaking monolingual is to feel at home and acquire a level of comfort, materials in museums, libraries and other public spaces such as public transportation and retail stores, must be available in Spanish.

There is a need for school programs that provide mentoring opportunities and celebrate Latino heritage. These programs will allow students and parents to feel at home, and will illustrate that educational systems acknowledge Latino heritage, culture and history. Latino parents, strong supporters of education, often see formal, non-faith based institutions as alien places. Through inclusive arts programming, alienation can be minimized. Local arts councils, educators and parent organizations must partner to coordinate Latino involvement, as well as initiate the development of culturally appropriate materials. Training workshops, perhaps in conjunction with state humanities or arts councils, can develop "master teachers" or community scholars to train educators, cultural and social service workers.

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Many school and public libraries lack extensive collections of periodicals and books available in Spanish. Library and school systems should consider partnering with Mexican Consulate offices to facilitate increasing Spanish language collections. The accessibility to literature and other materials will further promote literacy in the home and provide Latino children with familiarity to their native language. For example, Wake County Public Libraries (NC) provide a number of Spanish language activities and resources for their patrons, including the annual *Día del los Niños/Día del los Libros*. (*Día del Niños*, observed on April 30, is the Mexican holiday, Children's Day.) The *Día del los Niños/Día del los Libros* program should be considered by other state library systems as a potential model for encouraging library participation from the Latino community.

Establish university programs focusing on Latino culture, develop Latino Studies programs, or include Latino literature, dance, music, visual arts, etc. within existing structures to broaden cultural perspectives. As more and more Latino students attend American colleges and universities, the need for such programs will increase. Additionally, the non-Latino student population will become more aware and knowledgeable of Latino culture and art.

Language and education are critical for the development of a Latino citizenry that will continue to grow and make demands for increased attention to their needs. Education does not only occur in formal school settings; tradition is typically transmitted in the home and community. Recommendations from the report also include surveys of the traditional arts in the four communities where public meetings took place. Surveys will provide comprehensive lists of artists working in the community in formal and informal structures.

Infrastructure

A second critical area addresses the infrastructure needs that include physical space and venues for cultural expressions. This issue was identified at all four of the public meetings. These potential centers would serve as a resource for community service needs, but also as venues for teaching and learning, as well as reinforcing cultural heritage. The addition of a space dedicated to specific artistic expressions has successfully become a magnet for artists and art education in a number of metropolitan areas including such model programs as: San Antonio (Gudalupe Cultural Arts Center); San Francisco (Casa de la Raza and Self-Help Graphics); Chicago (Museo Mexicano); and Philadelphia (Taller Puertorriqueno, Inc.).

Technical Assistance and Professional Development

Infrastructure is dependent on the quality and quantity of technical assistance and professional development. Many emerging Latino organizations are run by volunteers, while others survive with small staffs and advisory boards or committees. As illustrated through community meetings, many non-Latino organizations want to involve their Latino neighbors in programming and other activities, yet lack the network or cultural expertise to successfully undertake these tasks. Emerging Latino organizations also need similar technical assistance and professional development to assist them in assimilating their organizations into other community groups. Financial management and the lack of coherent development planning, often make fundraising extremely difficult for these new organizations. The development of fundraising and grant writing skills is vital. While surveys of existing arts is a worthwhile idea and needs to be supported, they will not translate into tangible and real change until the infrastructure exist to make use of the survey findings.

Summary

The need for physical space is foremost followed by a need for training and leadership development for the groups already in existence and those seeking to find a place. Cultural centers cannot exist and survive without trained staff and boards. The network that many of the meeting participants requested could be launched via the Internet, through a Web site that links and provides information to all the groups in the region. This resource would have to be facilitated and maintained by an organization with a strong understanding of Latino culture, the Spanish language, and the broad arts community.

Closely linked to the infrastructure is the third area identified as technical assistance, and professional development for individual and groups of artists, and cultural and social service workers. The community of artists, traditional arts practitioners, and scholars that participated in public meetings and responded to questionnaires were found to be vibrant and ready for major changes. These individuals are ready to collaborate and tackle the challenges they identified. The challenges are many, but not insurmountable. With the spirit of collaboration and *ganas* (willingness and ability), they will no doubt produce positive change. In its role as supporter, the SAF can act as a catalyst for actions that will undoubtedly result in benefits far beyond the financial and time investment required.

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*The complete report is published and is available as a PDF document on the
Southern Arts Federation Web site:*

www.southarts.org

You can also request a printed copy by contacting Teresa Hollingsworth at (404) 874-7244, ext. 14.