

A Letter from The Crimsonbridge Foundation

The Crimsonbridge Foundation is honored to present *Reaching and Engaging with the Hispanic Community: A Research-Informed Communication Guide for Nonprofits, Policymakers and Funders*. This guide is designed to help service providers and educators build communication strategies to more easily and effectively reach out to Latino children and families. We are grateful for our partnership with Child Trends, the nation's leading nonprofit research organization focused on conducting and sharing research to improve the lives of children and youth. Throughout this collaborative effort, we have been inspired by them and by so many others who contributed their ideas, experiences and talent to help create this necessary working tool.

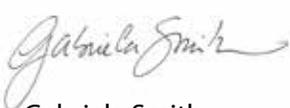
Crimsonbridge is a nonpartisan, entrepreneurial, philanthropic organization; we believe in the transformative power of education and are privileged to have worked for children and families of all backgrounds and across sectors. Our mission is to build bridges of collaboration and strategically invest in education, leadership development, and capacity building programs to help America's youth and nonprofit organizations achieve their potential.

Why create a communications guide? Because we have tremendous respect for the work of nonprofit organizations, and we aim to strengthen their communications capacity so they can better engage with the Hispanic communities they serve. There is an increasing awareness of the need for strategic outreach to more effectively work with this underserved sector. We expect this guide will help organizations reach out to Latino families with information and guidance about opportunities in education, health, English literacy, job training, and many other programs already in place. It is our heartfelt hope that it will help overcome communication barriers and facilitate positive engagement and collaboration.

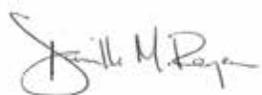
Why focus on the Hispanic community? The Hispanic population represents the United States' largest, and youngest, minority group. One out of four children in the United States is Hispanic. And 90 percent of Latino children in the country are U.S. citizens. By the year 2050, one out of three children and over 30 percent of the U.S. population will be of Hispanic heritage. These young children today will constitute a significant segment of the country's future. But they and their families face serious challenges, and two thirds of them live in or near poverty. It is clear, but not widely recognized, that their education and well-being will have a profound impact not only on their communities, but on the country as a whole. This is a rising national challenge. Working to help these families access quality education has evolved from being a needed and important service, to becoming an imperative for the future competitiveness of our nation.

At Crimsonbridge, we humbly hope that this guide will serve as an informative tool for nonprofits, funders and policymakers working to meet this challenge. We encourage these organizations to download it (free of charge) and share it with like-minded organizations. We dedicate this guide to them and to the many and diverse communities they serve. We believe that by working together we are building a stronger America for all.

Sincerely,



Gabriela Smith
President and Founder



Danielle Reyes
Executive Director



Reaching and Engaging with Hispanic Communities:

A Research-Informed Communication Guide for Nonprofits, Policymakers, and Funders

About the Authors

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Executive Summary

Strategic communication is central to an organization's ability to advance its mission and its capacity to serve the community. *Reaching and Engaging with Hispanic Communities: A Research-Informed Communication Guide* is designed to help service providers and educators build communication strategies to better serve Latino children and their families.^a

Based on current scholarly research, focus groups with Latino parents, and the ground-level experiences of community-based nonprofit organizations serving diverse Hispanic communities, this new resource also reflects the strategic communication expertise of the Child Trends Hispanic Institute. The report was made possible by a partnership between the Child Trends Hispanic Institute and the Crimsonbridge Foundation.

Focusing on Hispanic children and their families

The Hispanic population in the United States has grown from 4.4 percent of the national total in the 1970 Census to 17.6 percent in 2016.^{1,2} It now represents the nation's largest, and youngest, minority group. Nearly one third (32 percent) of the Latino population is under 18 years old, and almost half (47 percent) of U.S.-born Hispanics are younger than 18. Currently, one quarter of children in the United States are Hispanic, and demographers predict that by 2050, one third of all U.S. children will be Latino. Two thirds of Hispanic children also live in or near poverty; their well-being has important implications for the future of the country.³

The value of good communication for service providers and educators

The number of nonprofit organizations that serve low-income families and their children has likewise grown in recent years.⁴ Some of these organizations have a strong track record of serving Hispanic communities; many others are less prepared to respond to the needs of their new or expanding client base. At the same

^a Throughout this guide, we use the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" interchangeably.



time, we know from research that Hispanic families access certain public assistance programs at lower rates than their peers.⁵ If service providers are going to make a difference in the lives of Latino children, they must reach and engage effectively with Latino families and communities.

Developing a communication strategy

An organization's communication strategy, or plan, can be an essential tool for developing strong and lasting relationships—with the communities it serves, with other agencies, and with policymakers and funders—particularly when the plan is integrated into the organization's short- and long-term programming. In addition, a strong communication plan gives prospective funders a way to evaluate an organization's strategy and capacity by demonstrating the potential impact and outcomes of their support.

Many funders focus on supporting organizations' core strategic communication as a way to increase the impact of limited resources. Effective communication strategies, for example, can help service providers target the parents and families that seek their services. A well-crafted message in an organizational brochure, public service announcement, or website will attract new people to an agency, and will also clearly advertise the program's purpose, schedule, costs, and eligibility requirements. A well-communicated message makes it easier for potential participants to self-select for programs that meet their needs, saving time and resources for both family and staff. Strategic communication can help organizations streamline operations and maximize the impact of funder dollars on the provision of services.

"Know your audience" is one of the first rules of developing an effective communication strategy, and one that requires providers to do their homework. Latinos in the United States trace their origins to more than 20 Latin American countries, and to vastly different locales throughout the United States. While they all share some important characteristics, an effective communication and engagement strategy should convey an understanding of the diversity of this population—or more accurately, populations.

Integrating research and the communication framework

This guide is based on original qualitative research with multiple Hispanic communities in the United States, and on insights gathered from a review of available research literature covering:

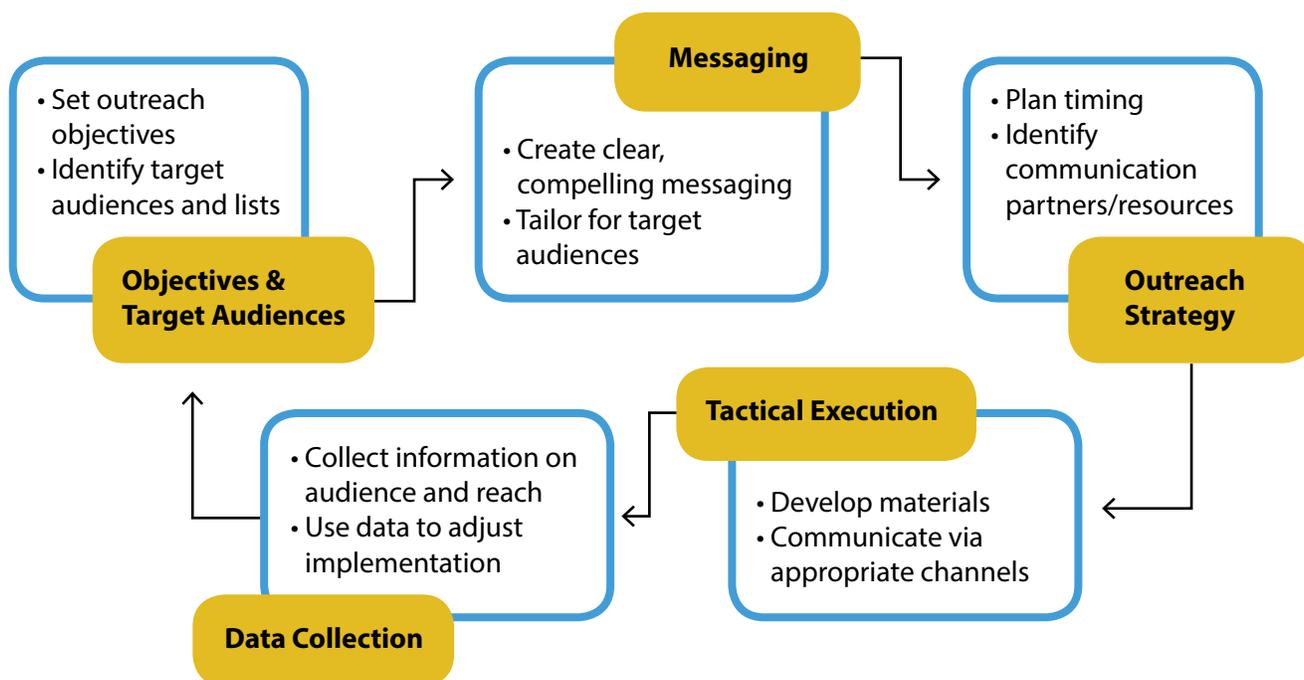
- The history of Hispanic-origin populations in the United States, including the evolution of the terminology used to describe these communities;
- Hispanics' media and technology use, particularly their preferred sources of information and entertainment, the messaging channels they have access to, and the integration of their language and culture into these channels; and
- Hispanics' use of services within their communities, and culturally sensitive practices that facilitate the use of services.

Reaching and Engaging Hispanic Communities: A Research-Informed Communication Guide, incorporates findings from the literature review, focus group data, and provider interviews. The guide is meant to help providers as they develop their organizational communication strategies. Our research findings illustrate best practices for working with Latino communities, and are presented at each step of the communication framework depicted below. This framework is widely used by communication professionals; it is the basis for numerous strategic communication "how-to" publications, and similar frameworks can be found across many disciplines.^{6,7,8}



Because it integrates an effective communication framework with best practices for reaching and engaging diverse Latino populations, this guide can be a simple but powerful tool to support providers working with Hispanic communities.

Figure 1. A model of the basic communication framework



SOURCE: Walter, F., Torres, A., Aldebot-Green, A. (2015). Elevating Quality Rating and Improvement System Communications: How to Improve Outreach to and Engagement with Providers, Parents, Policymakers, and the Public. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.

The first step when developing a communication strategy is to **identify the target audience** or audiences and **set outreach objectives**. Together, the target audience and strategic objectives form the foundation of any outreach and engagement plan.

The second step is to **create the message** or messages you want to communicate to your target audience. Your messages will be based on your outreach objectives and tailored to attract and engage a specific audience. Each message should inform and/or inspire action by your intended audience.

The third step pulls together the components of your **outreach strategy**, and includes timing the delivery of your message, coordinating communication efforts with your organization’s program calendar, and identifying external and in-house resources. Just as important as the message you want to communicate are the language(s) and cultural elements you will use to deliver your message. This guide provides a road map that can help you choose the most appropriate communication channels for reaching and engaging the communities you serve.

The next step in our communication framework is **tactical execution**: developing materials such as brochures, website and social media content, and scripts for public service announcements and/or radio interviews, and



then using these communication vehicles to powerfully **deliver your message** to your target audience.

The final step will be to **collect data—to update** what you know about your audience and determine which channel and what messages brought them to your organization. Did your outreach efforts accomplish your intended objectives? In order to assess the success of your communication strategy, you will need to track the responses to each outreach component. It is important to identify your measures of communication success, or metrics, when you are developing your objectives.

Recommendations for service providers

Hispanics, like the general population, access information from a variety of sources. Service providers should therefore use multiple communication channels to reach their audiences. This means learning how and where your target audiences prefer to get their information, including direct person-to-person communication, traditional news media, and social media. “Traditional news media” includes both Spanish and English TV and radio networks, and newspapers (print and digital).

1. Know your audience; take time up front to understand their backgrounds and preferences.

Base your communication plan on information you gather about the community you serve. Given the varied backgrounds and experiences of Latino populations, individual communities will receive and interpret messages about services in different ways, and they will respond to these messages in different ways as well.

2. Improve your ability to engage with your community about issues that are relevant to them. Assess the needs of your local Hispanic communities.

Conducting a needs assessment is a standard practice for the development of social service programs. A needs assessment can inform your communication strategy by deepening your knowledge of the target audience. The needs assessment can help identify the physical and knowledge barriers that deter families from accessing education, health, and social services. The service provider may or may not be in the immediate control of these barriers, but an awareness of them can lead to innovative solutions or new partnerships that will improve the providers’ reach. A needs assessment may also uncover services gaps where the community’s needs are not being met.

Keys to an effective communication approach^a

- **Be comprehensive.** To most effectively reach Latino families, develop a comprehensive approach using multiple communication channels (i.e., television and radio, flyers, door-to-door outreach, email, an organizational website, social media, etc.). Use the channels that your target audience relies on and trusts, in the language and content format they find most accessible.
- **Be specific.** Target your communication based on the specific characteristics of the families and communities that your organization serves (recognizing the diversity that exists among Latino communities).
- **Track results.** Track your results monthly or quarterly to gauge how well your communication outreach efforts are reaching your target audience. This could include measuring website visits and views, phone calls and walk-ins following media placements, email open rates, social media “likes” and increase in followers, and user satisfaction with your work. Use this information to guide future engagement efforts.

^a Walter, F., Torres, A. & Aldebot-Green, A. (2015). Elevating Quality Rating and Improvement System Communications: How to Improve Outreach to and Engagement with Providers, Parents, Policymakers, and the Public. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.



3. Many Latinos have strong preferences about how they self-identify—take note of their preferences in your outreach efforts.

While most national news outlets, government agencies such as the U.S. Census Bureau, and research organizations like the Pew Research Center have opted to use “Latino” and “Hispanic” interchangeably, we recommend that you let the Hispanic families and individuals you serve self-identify as they see fit. The community targeted by a specific service provider may have a preference for one or neither of these terms. A majority of Hispanic adults surveyed in 2011 preferred to identify themselves by their family’s country of origin, i.e., “Puerto Rican,” “Honduran,” or “Mexican,” rather than by the umbrella terms “Hispanic” or “Latino.”⁹

4. To establish productive relationships, build on the respect Hispanic communities have for family.

From the smallest unit of the family to the broader society, Latinos value community. Taking time to engage with Hispanic families and displaying how much you value their participation can support their continued use of services.

5. Direct person-to-person contact is best when communicating with Latino families.

Not surprisingly, personal contact remains the most direct and effective way for service providers and educators to communicate with Hispanic families. Face-to-face communication allows for a level of interaction and an exchange of information that few, if any, alternatives can match. Most of the service providers we spoke with emphasized the importance of personal contact, including door-to-door visits, in-person distribution of flyers to people on neighborhood streets with heavy pedestrian use, meet-ups with parents and students at schools and school bus stops, and attendance at community events. While these are often labor-intensive approaches, they have been proven to be effective.

6. Partner with well-respected community leaders to improve outcomes for Hispanic families.

To gain buy-in from Hispanic families, consider engaging and partnering with well-respected community members. In addition to civic community leaders, it may be important to reach out to informal influencers as well, including relied-upon community medical providers and faith leaders.¹⁰ These partnerships can serve as a means of supporting families as they continue using a service, and can also help programs locate and recruit others in need of services. Organizations who serve children are often trusted community members and a conduit to Hispanic families.

7. Leverage “influencers” who can open doors to the community you work with.

Local influencers and peers can help open communication with Latino families in the community. An influencer or opinion leader is someone who families turn to for advice and counsel. They are individuals (either by personal acquaintance or reputation) who have the credibility to effectively give advice, affect public opinion, or call for action.

8. Some Hispanic families may not welcome phone calls or text messaging—instead, build your campaign using other forms of direct communication, so that phone calls and text messaging can be used to complement and reinforce these other channels.

Our research found that texting and phone calls complement and reinforce other communication outreach efforts. Focus group participants agreed that they prefer face-to-face interactions, but that phone calls can help them engage more directly with the provider. This was particularly the case for participants with low-to-no literacy skills, especially if they are contacted by someone who is bilingual. Be sure to ask participants for their consent to be contacted by phone or text messaging.



9. Reach Latinos through the media channels they rely on most—and most Latinos rely on traditional media like television and radio for information and entertainment.

While Latinos, especially the younger generations, are increasingly reliant on social media, most Hispanic households still rely primarily on traditional media such as television and radio for information and entertainment. Since large-scale advertising campaigns are not always feasible, consider how your organization can partner with popular local newspapers and television and radio programs to feature your organization's work. Also consider how your organization can provide a voice in coverage about social services and their impact on the Latino communities.

Spanish-language media and local channels are popular news sources among Hispanics. Advertising spots or public service announcements (PSAs) do not need to be limited to the timing of news shows; with a bit of research it is possible to determine which news and entertainment programming hours are favored by your target audiences. Given the popularity of *telenovelas*, placing announcements during those programming hours may help reach a significant number of Latinos.

10. Take advantage of social media, especially when reaching out to younger Latinos—but do your homework before launching a social media campaign aimed at other generations, particularly if they are low-income and/or immigrants.

The internet and social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have helped establish new ways of connecting with others and creating communities. Like most groups, Hispanics increasingly use these networks to stay in touch and engage with family and friends, and to connect with social and professional groups. Organizations should consider how a social media component may fit into their outreach and communication strategy. If the target audience is active on social media, it can be a cost-effective way to communicate program information, develop rapport, and build community.

11. For more user-friendly websites, make sure they are mobile-optimized (many Latino families are smartphone dependent, and only access the Internet on mobile devices) and consider imbedded video shorts (in Spanish &/or English as appropriate) to inform users about your services and how to reach you directly.

Latinos use digital technology to consume news at similar rates as other racial and ethnic populations.¹¹ However, many low-income Hispanic families, including more recent immigrant families, are frequently “smartphone dependent,” with limited options for Internet access apart from their smartphone. Mobile-optimized websites, which are designed to work as well on a mobile device as a desktop computer, will give Latinos greater access to your organization's services. When sites are not mobile optimized, they can be harder to see and use on a smartphone, which will hinder the delivery of information. In addition, popular search engines such as Google prioritize search results for sites that are optimized for mobile access.

12. Consider the best language to reach and engage your target community—with so many Hispanic households composed of both Spanish- and English-dominant speakers, the future is bilingual.

What language will best reach the communities you work with needs to be thought through carefully and driven by the audiences you are targeting. For example, since English-proficiency remains low among newer immigrant families, programs in areas with high immigrant populations may need messages entirely in Spanish to adequately inform and engage them. At the same time, there are growing numbers of Latinos who are English-proficient and English-dominant. Researching language use in the community you serve can ensure that your communication strategies are designed for clarity and effective messaging.



13. Carefully choose how best to incorporate appropriate cultural elements.

Using Spanish can show a respect for Hispanic culture and may be the most effective way to reach some groups within Latino communities, but additional cultural elements are essential to this process. When using graphic elements on your website, in brochures, or on social media, make sure that they are relatable to the Hispanic audiences you intend to reach. Due to the diversity among Hispanic communities, different cultural elements are not always shared. Using the images, sounds, and other hallmarks of specific Latino communities in your service area, can influence your audience's ability to relate to your organization's messages.

14. Ensure your materials are reading-level appropriate for the specific community you serve.

In the context of diverse Latino populations, with a wide variation in education and literacy in either language, it is particularly important to ensure your materials are reading-level appropriate. *Plain language* refers to written communication that is clear and accessible. Short sentences, active voice, and simple vocabulary all help keep materials appropriate for a range of reading and literacy levels. *Reading level* determines whether your written materials—whether in Spanish or English—will be easily understood by the intended audience. The average reading level in the United States for native English speakers is eighth grade.

15. Track your results, adjust your strategies, and improve your communication and engagement.

Keeping track of your communication efforts allows you to adjust your strategy as you learn what methods work best for your target audience and program goals. Setting objectives at the outset of your campaign allows you to track your success and evaluate the effectiveness and learning points for each component of your communication plan.

16. Learn from each outreach strategy: think critically about which components of your strategy were the most effective and which were least effective, and why.

By evaluating each step of your communication strategy you will gain perspective about the communication process overall. Lessons learned throughout an outreach campaign enable you to refine and improve your communication strategies going forward.





Reaching and Engaging with Hispanic Communities:

A Research-Informed Communication Guide

Overview

This communication guide is intended for service providers and educators who work with Hispanic communities, and in particular, with low-income Hispanic families. The background research for this guide included an extensive review of the available research literature, focus groups with Latino/Hispanic parents, and interviews with communication professionals in Hispanic-serving organizations. In order to include voices from diverse Latino communities, the focus groups and interviews were conducted in one suburban community and various mid- to large-sized cities in three different regions of the United States with high concentrations of Latinos: the Mid-Atlantic, the West Coast, and the Southwest.



Qualitative research

Bilingual researchers conducted focus groups and interviews in the fall and winter of 2015/2016. In total, there were five focus groups with 54 parents overall, and 14 interviews with service providers responsible for their organizations' communication activities.

Focus group parents and service providers were recruited through community-based programs known to Child Trends, the Crimsonbridge Foundation, or to the researchers.

Group discussions with parents focused on several topics, including:

- the kinds of services parents access;
- the people parents trust to provide information related to their family's well-being;
- parents' use of media outlets to get information for their well-being and that of their family;
- parents' opinions and ideas about the best ways to communicate with Latino parents; and
- parents' preferred term for the population (e.g., "Hispanic," "Latino," or something else) and their reasons for that preference.

Interviews with providers focused on topics such as:

- their organization's communication capacity and their use of media and other strategies to reach and engage the community, especially Hispanic families;
- their organization's process for developing and delivering messages when engaging members of Latino communities;
- how organizations measure the effectiveness and success of communication efforts; and
- barriers to and facilitators of communicating with Latino populations.

The providers we interviewed were staff members in organizations that serve Latino communities, including four that serve Puerto Rican and Dominican communities, three serving Mexican and Mexican-American communities, and seven that serve diverse Latino communities including a large number of Central American and Mexican youth and families.

Provider organizations were located in Austin and San Antonio, Texas; New York City and Buffalo, New York; Los Angeles, California; and the Washington, DC-Metro Area, including Maryland.

Purpose and audiences

This communication guide has been prepared for service providers and educators who work with Hispanic children and their families, for the funders who partner with them, and for policymakers whose work impacts programs that serve Latino communities. An effective communication strategy is one key to developing strong and lasting relationships between providers and communities, particularly when integrated into an organization's short- and long-term planning process.



A good communication plan is integral to an organization's successful fundraising plan. It offers funders a way to evaluate the effectiveness of an organization's strategy and capacity by demonstrating the potential impact and outcomes of their support. Providers who serve Latino communities, as well as policymakers who fund or partner with organizations that provide social services, now must communicate and engage with a more diverse citizenry that includes Latinos from all walks of life.

An effective communication strategy will address:

- how to best reach Latino populations that are most in need of services;
- how to effectively engage with Hispanic families and the communities they live in;
- how to establish consistent, productive, and ongoing dialogues between providers and the communities they serve; and
- how to maximize impact with available financial resources.

Having an effective communication plan is important for organizations both large and small. Regardless of the size of their organization, service providers want to ensure that the people most in need of their services know how to access them, and funders want to be confident that their financial contributions are being used effectively.

While some organizations have resources to hire communication professionals, others do not. Many funders focus on supporting core strategic communication for organizations as a way to increase the impact of limited resources. Effective communication strategies, for example, can help service providers target parents and families who are seeking their services. A well-crafted message on an organizational website, brochure, or public service announcement will attract people new to an agency, and will clearly advertise the program's purpose, schedule, costs, and eligibility requirements. A well-communicated message makes it easier for potential participants to self-select for programs that meet their needs, saving time and resources for both participants and staff. Strategic communication can help organizations streamline operations and maximize the impact of funder dollars on the provision of services.

Focus on Latino children and families

In the United States, 1 in 4 children is Hispanic, and demographers predict that number will rise to 1 in 3 by 2050. Two thirds of Latino children live in or near poverty; their well-being has important implications for the future of the country. Yet we know from research that Hispanic families access support services at lower rates than other groups, in part due to a misguided belief that they are not eligible.¹²

The community is changing

In 1970, the Hispanic population in the United States was 9.1 million; by 2016, that number had grown to 56.6 million.¹³ As the Hispanic population has grown numerically over the past half century, it has also expanded beyond the rural Southwest and urban Northeast. For many years, most Spanish-surnamed Americans were either Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, or Cuban immigrants. Today, in cities and towns across the country, there are growing numbers of newer immigrants and their children who hail from Central or South America and other parts of the Caribbean. At the same time, since the turn of the 21st century, Hispanic population growth has been fueled more by U.S. births (9.6 million from 2000 to 2009) than by immigration (6.5 million between 2000 and 2009).¹⁴



Not all providers have experience with Latino communities

Parallel to the growth of Latino populations in the United States, there has been an increase in the number of Hispanic-serving nonprofit organizations.¹⁵ Service providers exist for the communities they serve—and as nonprofits, they are financed with public and private monies, from government dollars to foundation grants to fees for service and/or membership fees. Some of these organizations and schools already have a strong track record with Latino communities; others are learning to respond to the needs of their new or expanding client base.

Even service providers with deep roots in a long-established Latino community can benefit from stepping back and reassessing how they are reaching this target audience, and where they stand to improve. As one service provider told us:

Our organization was founded 26 years ago. We are well known in the Latino community: people know who we are. We have the support of leaders in the community, we are called on regularly by the local media to do interviews, and we're active on Facebook. And yet there are still large segments of the city we haven't reached—so many people have moved here recently from Mexico, and we need to get more connected to the new immigrants in the city. As the city grows we have to figure out ways to reach out to those people.

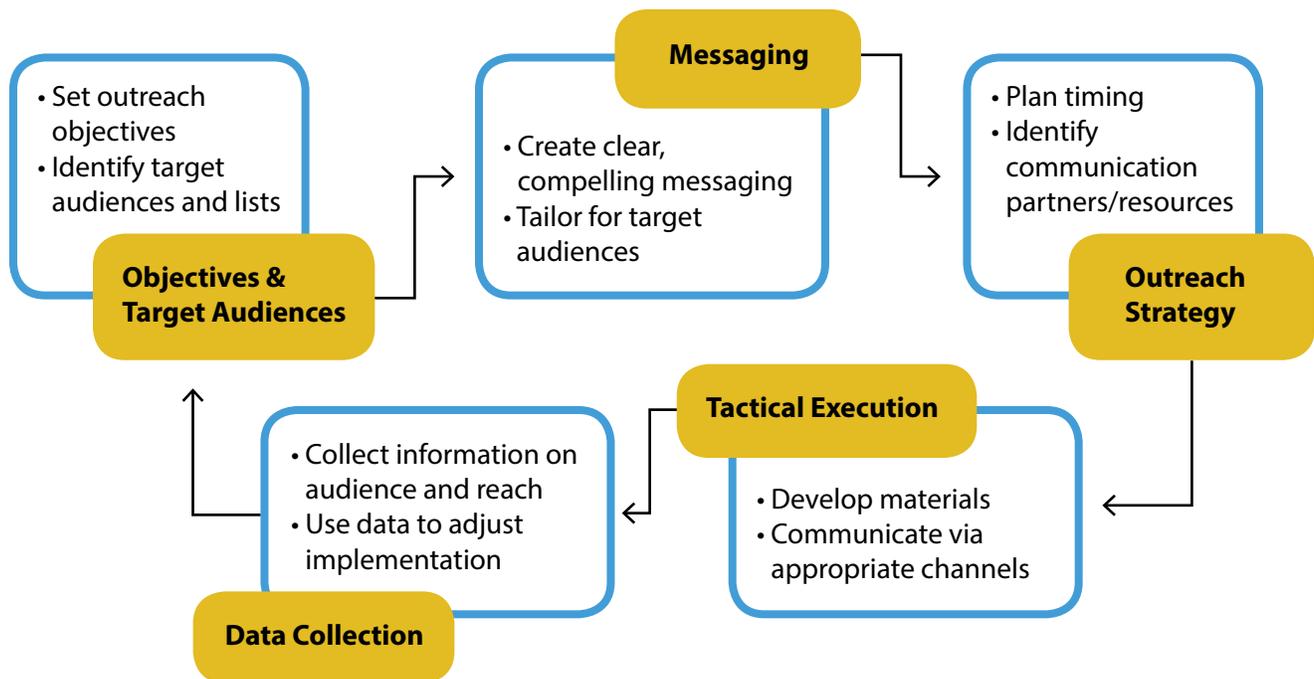




The Communication Framework

Below is a visual representation of the components of a basic framework for planning and implementing a communication plan. Let us look closer at each of these components.

Figure 1. A model of the basic communication framework



SOURCE: Walter, F., Torres, A., Aldebot-Green, A. (2015). Elevating Quality Rating and Improvement System Communications: How to Improve Outreach to and Engagement with Providers, Parents, Policymakers, and the Public. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.



Framework component 1: Objectives and target audiences

The first steps in developing an effective communication strategy are establishing objectives, and identifying a specific audience or audiences. These two pieces are the foundation of any organization’s work. Programs and services respond to the needs of a particular population or populations. Knowing the characteristics of a population allows you to tailor the approach and language you use, and to ensure that the programs and services you provide are appropriate and specific to this audience.

Set outreach objectives

Your communication objectives will be informed by *the message you are communicating* and *the target audience* for that message. Thus, the first steps in the development of a communication plan will be to pose and answer some basic questions about each of these. For example:

- What messages do we want to communicate about our programs and organization?
- Who are the audiences we want to reach with these messages?
- What are the particular needs and characteristics of each of these target audiences?

Asking questions like these will help guide the development of clear objectives for your communication plan. As you identify your objectives, keep in mind that you’ll want to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of each step the plan, in order to constantly improve your outreach and communication. In other words, look to see that each objective is *measurable*.

Here are some examples of measurable outreach objectives:

- Identify and reach out to new community audiences two times in the upcoming year with one door-to-door flyer campaign and one social media campaign with a goal of registering X-number of new program participants. [Measurable: how many new program participants signed up after each campaign?]
- Invite community members to a series of open houses each summer to meet staff and learn what services you provide and what services they are eligible for. [Measurable: how many new attendees participated in each open house?]

Keys to an effective communication approach^a

- **Be comprehensive.** To most effectively reach Latino families, develop a comprehensive approach using multiple communication channels (i.e., television and radio, flyers, door-to-door outreach, email, an organizational website, social media, etc.). Use the channels that your target audience relies on and trusts, in the language and content format they find most accessible.
- **Be specific.** Target your communication based on the specific characteristics of the families and communities that your organization serves (recognizing the diversity that exists among Latino communities).
- **Track results.** Track your results monthly or quarterly to gauge how well your communication outreach efforts are reaching your target audience. This could include measuring website visits and views, phone calls and walk-ins following media placements, email open rates, , social media “likes” and increase in followers, and user satisfaction with your work. Use this information to future engagement efforts.

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In each of these objectives, the target audience is “the community” or “community members,” which is your starting point. The next step is to get even more specific about who in the community you are reaching.

Let’s say your organization runs a successful afterschool program for elementary school children, and you are about to launch a series of ESL evening classes for adults. The *outreach objective* is to register 50 monolingual or Spanish-dominant adults from the identified target populations. You’ve identified a *target audience*: parents of children in the afterschool program.

The next step then is to ask what you know about this target audience. Who are the parents of the children in your afterschool program? What is their age range, countries of origin, education level or literacy level in English? In Spanish? The more specific you can get in describing your target audience, the more prepared you will be to communicate with them effectively.

Diversity among Latino communities

Latinos have a long, evolving history within the United States. They are a diverse group from multiple countries and living in different locales. While Latinos share some characteristics, the population—or more accurately, populations—is quite diverse.

Together, Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants make up the largest subgroup of Latinos. Both populations have a history that is closely tied to the territorial and economic growth of the United States. The first Mexicans to become U.S. citizens did not migrate across the U.S.-Mexico border. Rather, they were part of the large, northwestern region of Mexico that was ceded to the United States following the Mexican-American War in 1848. Despite being citizens, this population was often subjected to legal as well as social discrimination.^a

The next significant wave of Latino immigrants arrived as U.S. citizens: Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory in 1898 (along with Guam and the Philippines), following the Spanish-American War. Puerto Ricans gained citizenship in 1917, and Puerto Rican migrants soon settled in New York City and the Northeast.^b The expansion of U.S. interests in the Caribbean, as well those islands’ close proximity, set the stage for the next two waves of Latino migration. Cubans fleeing

the Cuban Revolution in 1959 were granted an expedited path to citizenship, with a large Cuban population settling in Miami.^c Immigrants from the Dominican Republic had neither U.S. citizenship nor a special dispensation. Nevertheless, by the 1990s Dominicans were the fourth largest Latino subgroup, with large settlements in New York City and throughout the East Coast.^d

During that same period, civil wars in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador sent new waves of immigrants to the United States. Since the 1970s, a combination of civil unrest and economic pressures have compelled thousands of additional immigrants to seek a home in the United States.^e

^a Pedraza, Silvia, and Rubén G. Rumbaut, eds. (1996). *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press.

^b Sanchez Korrol, V. (1994) *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

^c Cubans in the United States. (2006). Pew Hispanic Center. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.

^d Nwosu, C. & Batalova, J. (July 18, 2014) Spotlight. Immigrants from the Dominican Republic in the United States. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/foreign-born-dominican-republic-united-states/>

^e Gonzalez, J. (2011). *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. NY: Penguin Books.



Know your audience

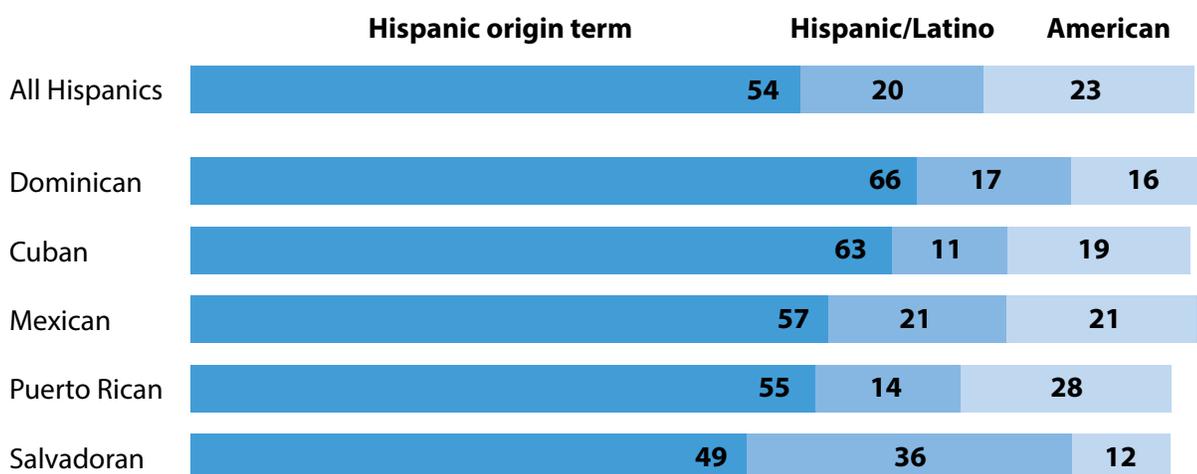
Even a service provider with deep roots in the community should spend time gathering information and learning more about their target audiences. The most stable and multi-generational neighborhood populations still experience change from generation to generation. And no community remains untouched by the rapidly evolving trends in technology and communication. It is good practice to explore these trends in a systematic and thorough manner.

An effective communication and engagement strategy will take into account the diversity of the specific Hispanic communities being served.

While populations with origins in Latin America have resided in the United States for centuries, it was not until the 1970s that there was an effort to create an umbrella ethnic term. The first official use of the term Hispanic appeared on the 1980 U.S. Census Questionnaire,¹⁶ and in the 2000 Census Questionnaire, that designation was expanded to “Hispanic/Latino.”

Figure 2. Most Latinos use a Hispanic-origin term to describe their identity

% who say they most often describe themselves as...



Note: Ranked by share responding with their Hispanic origin term. Volunteered responses of “Depends” and “Don’t know/Refused” not shown. Data from Pew Research Center survey of Hispanic adults, May 24 - July 28, 2013 (N=5,103).

SOURCE: López, Gustavo and Eileen Patten. (2015). “The Impact of Slowing Immigration: Foreign-Born Share Falls Among 14 Largest U.S. Hispanic Groups.” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Know your audiences—how do the different people you serve self-identify?

In a 2012 Pew Research Center survey, a majority of Hispanics reported that they most often identify themselves by their country of origin, or by that of their parents and grandparents.¹⁷ However, in another Pew survey on Hispanics and racial identities, two thirds of Hispanic adults say being “Hispanic” is part of



their racial background¹⁸—highlighting just one of the complicating factors for the Census Bureau and other organizations attempting to fit all Latinos into one box with one label.

Our focus group findings indicate that parents have mixed feelings about the term to use to describe their heritage. Approximately half thought “Latino” was a better term, as it is inclusive of populations from Latin America or of Latin American heritage. The other half of parents thought “Hispanic” was a better term, as it reflects the Spanish ancestry that Hispanics in the United States share. And a minority of focus group parents thought that either term could be used, so long as it is used with respect and does not accompany stereotypical ideas of the Latino population.

Knowing the history of the Latino population you work with—knowing your audience—is important if you are to avoid stereotyping. This knowledge can also give you a good foundation for developing an effective communication plan.

Identify your target audience with a communication needs assessment

A needs assessment can identify the physical and knowledge barriers that deter families from accessing education, health, and social services. These barriers may or may not be in the service provider’s immediate control, but awareness of them might lead to innovative solutions or new partnerships that will improve the provider’s reach. A thorough needs assessment may reveal gaps not currently covered by community services. Creating a communication strategy without conducting a needs assessment may result in duplication of services, or waste of resources.

One of the most common assessment tools is a survey. A survey is an investigation into the opinions or experiences of group of people; it consists of a series of questions. Service providers might ask these questions using questionnaires, focus groups, community *pláticas* or chats, or town meetings. These surveys can be adapted and used as the basis for ongoing assessments, allowing providers to keep up-to-date records on each program’s success and each participant’s interests.

Providers should identify opportunities to gather information about the people they want to reach and engage. These opportunities might include, for example, conducting door-to-door outreach campaigns to reach new audiences, or welcoming participants as they arrive for a workshop or other event. It is also useful to occasionally survey people who already use your services.

Questionnaires: A questionnaire is a basic survey tool that can be used to gather information, composed of a list of questions that may be open-ended or include multiple-choice answers. A questionnaire may be hard copy or digital. With a range of free tools available online, organizations can use software such as Survey Monkey to create online questionnaires, and to gather and tabulate the answers.¹⁹ Filling out a questionnaire

A questionnaire can be short and simple and yet provide you with critical information. For example, gathering answers to the questions below can help determine the success of your communication plan.

- *How do you prefer to be contacted—telephone call, text, email, through the mail, or in person?*
 - *What language do you prefer—English, Spanish, or some other language?*
-



requires literacy in the language it is written in, and computer literacy if administered online. However, it is possible to have someone read the questions aloud and record the answers.

Focus groups, community *pláticas*, and town meetings: A focus group is a formal, facilitated, small-group discussion about a set of predefined questions or topics. It can be a great way to gather opinions on anything from what to do about overcrowded elementary school classrooms to whether there is interest in organizing a community garden. Focus groups are used by social science or medical researchers, as well as by marketing firms seeking to test public opinions. Some organizations sponsor regular community discussions that may be less formal than a focus group, but help build community cohesion and investment in working together. Depending upon the desired outcome, town meetings or *pláticas* (see “Note on language” text box) can be as much about relationship-building with the community you serve as they are a means to update your database.

A follow-up can take multiple forms: some groups record meetings and larger conferences using audio or video tape, handwritten or typed notes, and photographs and sketches to compose *memorias*, a PDF and/or printed booklet to send out to participants and to keep in your organization’s archives. Keep in mind that you need to ask the participants’ consent to being recorded, and allow participants the choice of having their comments remain anonymous if they prefer. These recordings are historical documents, and a validation of an individual’s and a community’s lived experiences. Participants will appreciate having been heard, and be more inclined to participate in the future. Reporting on what was learned in the process can also benefit your organization and inform future efforts.

Questionnaires, and tools like focus groups, *pláticas*, and town meetings, can all be used to gather information about the families and communities you serve. No matter which tool you use, they all require advance planning and organizing in order to facilitate the group processes, record and document the discussions, and plan for follow-up. Following up can be as simple as a public acknowledgment on your Facebook page, or sending out thank-you notes. Not following up can make participants feel that their opinions were not appreciated, and could have a negative impact on your outreach efforts.

Note on language: Because Latino communities are so diverse, it is important to **know your audience** and to **use language they are familiar and comfortable with**. Providers we spoke with in New York told us about hosting “town meetings” with Puerto Rican families in New York City, which may not be as familiar to Mexican-Americans in San Antonio; providers in San Antonio described information-sharing get-togethers as “*pláticas*,” though that term may not be as familiar to Caribbean Latinos in New York. But those terms may be unfamiliar or even uncomfortable to Latinos in Arizona or Los Angeles. Refugees who migrated from Guatemala may remember that certain “town meetings” were used in military campaigns during the 1980s.²⁰ Providers will be most successful when taking care to use the language and terms used by the families they serve.



Even if your organization does not have the resources to design and develop a survey or focus group, some nonprofits access resources through local community colleges or universities. Professors who teach marketing, public relations, or community service courses could be contacted to request they take your organization as a “client” for a semester, during which students can assist with some of your outreach and/or research efforts. In addition, funders are often open to considering an additional, one-time grant for a survey aimed at improving your services to the community.

Surveys and focus groups offer providers different ways to fine-tune and better understand their specific audience, stay on top of changing needs, and test messages. The providers we interviewed used a variety of approaches to gather information about program participants and inform communication and outreach efforts. For example, one provider organization hosts multiple cultural events each month. Their approach is to see each event as an opportunity to connect with their target audience, and to keep their detailed participant database updated:

When people first arrive at an event, they sign in and we ask them if they are interested in working on [one of our projects]. In the database we have the contact information for each person—address, email . . . whether they are on Facebook or other social media, and we keep track of which events and activities they attend. We ask people what their interests are and we keep this in the database, so when we program the next event we can easily see the whole list of people who’ve attended events of this kind, and ensure they will receive mailers, phone calls, and email invitations if they are on that list.

Framework component 2: Messaging

Your messages are what you communicate with your target audience, based on your objectives for a particular program or service.

Messages should inform and/or inspire action by your intended audience. For example:

- Children who attend quality early education programs do better in kindergarten. Register your child today!
- Learn how to produce videos in our teen media camp!
- Get help writing your college essay in this weekend workshop!

Each message needs to be audience-specific. Each target audience will need a different appeal; just as you’ll be deciding to use Spanish

Spanish and English: The future is bilingual

English proficiency: Nearly two thirds (62 percent) of Hispanic adults in the United States speak English or report that they are bilingual.

Spanish maintenance: At the same time, Spanish is spoken in 35 percent of all Hispanic households. The value placed on maintaining fluency in Spanish spans across generations, and the desire to maintain Spanish fluency is prevalent among both foreign-born and U.S.-born Hispanics.

Bilingual future: While English proficiency is on the rise, Latinos continue to be dual-language learners. This pattern reflects the value Hispanics place on knowing and understanding both English and Spanish: nearly 9 in 10 Latinos (87 percent) say adult Hispanic immigrants need to learn English to succeed in the United States, and 95 percent of Latinos say it is either very important or somewhat important that future generations of Latinos living in the United States speak Spanish.^a

^a Taylor, P., Lopez, M.H., Martinez, J. & Velasco, G. (2012). Language use Among Latinos. *When Labels Don’t Fit: Hispanics and Their Views of Identity*. Hispanic Trends. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.



We collect information about what language is spoken at home . . . because we want to make sure that people understand our flyers and other materials. You don't translate word by word, you have to translate by meaning ... sometimes we have to omit content if it's unable to be translated. The translation company that we are using for the website translates for low literacy and they are going to be writing in very simple language . . . it will be written in a very easy-to-read style. (Provider, D.C. Metro Area)

and/or English based on a target audience's primary or preferred language, so the message for each audience will be based on what that audience will find relevant and compelling.

When developing the messaging in line with your communication strategy for reaching your Hispanic target audiences, you will be relying on what you know and have learned from the information you have gathered. In order to create a clear and compelling message, gather all the information you have about your audience—for example, language and preferred communication medium (social media messages or flyers, email blasts, or radio announcements)—prior to crafting your messages.

When we asked parents to describe the kinds of things that a communication product needs to include, the

majority stated that the message needs to be in their preferred language, clear and to the point, relevant to the information they are seeking, and include cost of the service.

Create clear, compelling messaging

Research suggests that messages that align with the values and beliefs of the audience and its culture tend to be received and interpreted as intended. By the same token, when messages do not align well with the audiences' beliefs and culture, they tend to be less effective.²¹ This reinforces the need to know your audiences: it can help you to develop more effective messages that resonate with them.

Since Latino communities can be very diverse regionally, culturally, and linguistically, it is critical that service providers create messages that are community-specific. For example, when choosing graphic elements or audio for print and multimedia communication channels, use the images, sounds, and other hallmarks of the specific Latino culture you serve. Cultural symbols may be very different from one group to the next. New Mexico and Texas both have large Hispanic populations, but a tour of Hispanic communities from South Texas to northern New Mexico will reveal significant cultural differences in cuisine, music, and language.

Messaging needs to be in the language your audience will understand and respond to. Your audiences' preferences and needs should determine whether you produce content in Spanish or English. For example, since English proficiency remains low among recent immigrant families, programs working with newly-arrived immigrant populations may need to deliver messages in Spanish to adequately inform and engage these groups. At the same time, care should be taken to consider the growing number of Latinos who are English-proficient and even English-dominant. Researching language use among your target populations can ensure that your communication is designed for clarity and effective messaging.

Using Spanish is one way to show respect for, and acknowledgment of, Hispanic culture, but care must be taken not to lose information in translation. For example, certain English-language idioms and practices used in the United States might not be understandable in a word-for-word translation into Spanish. A bilingual speaker who understands multiple regional Spanish preferences can help navigate those nuances, and can help develop Spanish-language materials. Including Spanish phrases that appeal to specific ideas and emotions and/or reflect current speech patterns of your audience may improve the response to your message in English, particularly among those who are bilingual.



Parents in our focus groups were appreciative that service providers take the time to translate communication materials from English to Spanish. At the same time, there was widespread agreement that translations are only useful when they are accurate, grammatically correct, and employ familiar terms. Focus group parents stressed that translations are most effective when the intended message is presented in language they understand. The vast majority of service providers agreed that materials need to be translated into Spanish, but reported that they do not always have translation skills in-house, or the resources to have materials translated.

Framework components 3 and 4: Outreach strategy and tactical execution

This section provides a road map for service providers that can help you choose the most appropriate communication channels for reaching and engaging the communities you serve. An outreach strategy will take into consideration everything we have reviewed so far: who you are communicating to, the message you want to communicate, and the language(s) and cultural elements you will be using in your message. The next step in our communication framework diagram is tactical execution: determining what communication vehicle or vehicles are most appropriate to reach your audience, and employing those vehicles to get the message to your audience.

New technology provides us with many channels to reach our audiences. The key to choosing the right communication vehicle is understanding the communication preferences of the Hispanic audiences you are trying to reach, as well as the various options available to you. In order to decide the best outreach strategy, it is critical to understand the different ways that Latinos prefer to access and receive information, what sources of information they use and trust, and the technologies they use to access information. While we have emphasized the diversity of Hispanic cultures, there are some research findings that provide a general picture of how different Latinos access information, and their preferences and trusted sources.

Plain language

In 2010, President Obama signed the Plain Writing Act, requiring federal agencies to use a clear communication style in a language the public can understand and use. The federal Plain Language website has a wealth of easily accessible tips and tools, and a plain language guide available for download.

For English, see the federal website: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/index.cfm>

The plain language movement is an international effort, luckily for providers who communicate in Spanish. The link below leads to a plain language guide in Spanish: www.dnp.gov.co/estudios-y-publicaciones/publicaciones/Paginas/2015.aspx

For tips on planning a plain language website: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/webPL/index.cf>



Practice direct communication with Latino families

Not surprisingly, personal contact remains the most direct and effective way for educators and service providers to communicate with the Latino families and communities they serve. When we speak with someone face-to-face, it allows for a level of interaction and an exchange of information that few, if any, alternatives can match.

Building strong relationships based on cooperation and commitment with the individuals and families you serve is central to your success. Most of the service providers we spoke with emphasized the importance of personal contact—even while acknowledging that it can be labor-intensive. Providers with decades of experience serving Latino families, whether in New York City or San Antonio, said they had the most success with face-to-face outreach campaigns, including going door-to-door, distributing flyers on streets with heavy pedestrian use, meeting parents and students at schools and bus stops, and attending community events.

Several providers emphasized that person-to-person communication is more than an outreach tactic to be practiced only occasionally; rather, they have made it integral to their organizational culture. One provider described how they have made relationship-building one of the central pillars of their organizational culture, and that *every staff member* is expected to participate in outreach and recruitment:

Our target populations are some of the most hard-to-reach, isolated families. Our main recruitment is going door-to-door because that's the only way we'll get to know those families. And [at our organization] everyone does outreach, from the executive director to the cooks . . . It's very important that when people come to our building, they see the same people who came to their homes. That way they know we walk the talk.

Other organizations have found they can make up for limited staff by using temporary workers during critical community outreach periods. An organization that supports Latino high school students applying for college and financial aid has a small core staff and brings in a team of trained outreach workers during the summer rush period:

A very important part of our work is done by hiring "ambassadors" once a year to go out to help us develop a target, and conduct outreach to promote our services [...] they do in-person visits to schools, community organizations, pep rallies, parent centers, and in our offices in the schools.

Even providers we interviewed that do not currently do face-to-face outreach, or whose face-to-face work is limited by the number of available staff, told us that direct contact was the most effective tool for reaching the Latino parents, families, and youth they serve. Providers unanimously said face-to-face contact was their most powerful communication tool, and more than one parent in our focus groups commented on the effectiveness of learning about a program or service via multiple sources.

Use other forms of direct communication

Another form of direct communication that providers have found useful is engaging parents using phone calls and text messages. Many of the parents in our focus groups reported mostly positive experiences with receiving text messages and phone calls from their children's classroom teachers and school personnel—and this was particularly the case for those with low-level literacy skills whether in Spanish or English. These mothers appreciated the effort being made to communicate with them about upcoming children's school assignments or events. Texting and phone calls may offer promising outcomes, provided the individual parents agree to be contacted this way.



A recent survey of 17 Latino-serving organizations in Chicago looked at these providers' experiences with digital media, including text-messaging, for communicating with Latinos.²² For example, one organization serving low-income children experimented with a parent-specific subscription service that sends out daily text messages with parenting tips.

In general, whether and how you use text messaging to engage Latinos will vary depending upon your target audience. Our research found that texting and phone calls can complement and reinforce other communication outreach efforts. Focus group participants agreed that they prefer face-to-face interactions, but that phone calls can help them engage. This was particularly the case for participants with low-to-no literacy skills, who felt that phones are a safe way to ask questions and hold a conversation with professionals (e.g., ask questions), especially if they are contacted by someone who is bilingual.

While parents in our focus groups viewed providers' using text messages to keep them informed as a positive thing, they also had some caveats: texting should not be the only mode of communication; texts should be short and clear; and they should be in the appropriate language, whether Spanish or English. Most parents felt that text messages should be followed by direct person-to-person contact.

Organizations use text messaging in a variety of ways. In the example just given, text messaging was used in parent-teacher communication. Another provider described the successful launch of a text messaging campaign:

For the first time this year we launched a texting campaign—students were asked to send a text to our phone number so they could be put on our mailing list—in return we give a gift, this year it was a pair of sunglasses with our name on it. I think for the work we are doing, reaching out directly to youth, the texting piece was more impactful than we were expecting. (Provider, Los Angeles)

Communicate with Latinos through opinion leaders and influencers

The personal influence of opinion leaders and peers can help you communicate with Hispanic families. An opinion leader or influencer is someone families may turn to for advice and counsel, typically because she or he has more knowledge or information about the issue in question. They are individuals who have the credibility (either by personal acquaintance or reputation) to effectively give advice, affect opinion, or call for action.

The majority of focus group participants told us that they regularly engage with and trust information from community sources they believe are trustworthy, such as schools, churches, and media outlets (e.g., Univision and Telemundo). Similarly, most service providers told us that schools and churches are good places to reach their target communities.

Knowing your target audience's trusted sources is a good starting place when identifying well-respected community members to engage and partner with. In addition to civic community leaders and church and religious leaders, reach out to informal influencers in the community, such as medical and spiritual practitioners. These community members can support your program by helping locate and recruit others in need of services, or providing information about the audiences you are trying to reach. An opinion leader does not need to be a celebrity or someone famous, nor do they need to directly advertise a program to have an influence.

Communication tip: Keep in mind that influencers are best used to persuade and motivate, not to inform.



For example, one focus group participant spoke of her concern that, “as parents, we have to determine who to trust.” She described learning about available services in her community from an announcement following mass at her church: “This man came to tell us about community organizations where you can get help. Because he came to the church . . . I thought this has to be okay, the priest isn’t going to let [just anyone come to speak], so you know he was legitimate.”

An opinion leader could be a peer. Parent-to-parent outreach can be quite effective, and some of the best advertising for a program comes from program participants themselves.

Providers in San Antonio and New York City both reported that parents who have benefited from their early childhood program frequently bring their friends and neighbors to enroll the following season. Both of these providers described how their organizations exist as part of larger, multi-generational communities, with word-of-mouth outreach extending across generations: children who have attended their programs often return as adults, sometimes to enroll their own children, sometimes as volunteers, and sometimes as employees.

Word-of-mouth recommendations can also come from program participants who take flyers and brochures home to share with friends and neighbors.

Leverage Hispanic families’ technology habits to reach them

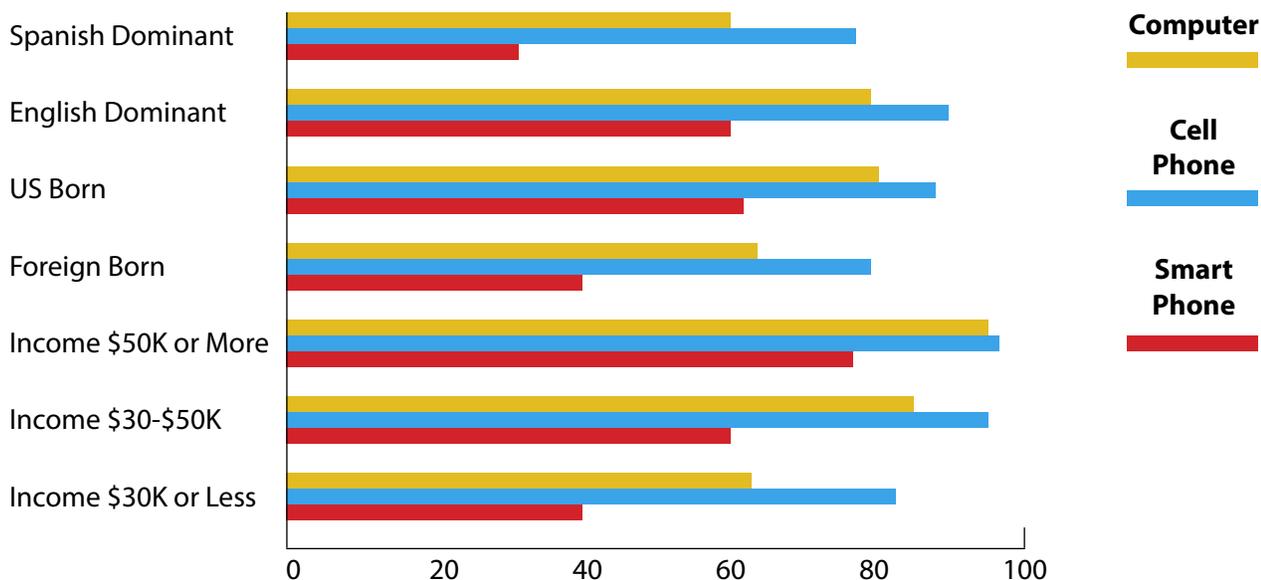
The digital age has brought technology into all areas of our lives, and more and more providers are using technology to engage with their Latino audiences. What do we know about Latinos’ use of technology that can improve our selection of communication vehicles to reach Latino families?

We know from research that the top three technologies used by Hispanic adults to access information and news are television, followed by mobile devices, and then radio.²³ Latinos rely less on newspapers than their White and African American counterparts—especially because Latino-oriented dailies are available in only a handful of cities, and Latino-focused weeklies are not always accessible. On the radio, Spanish-language stations dominate, as there are still only a handful of English-language Latino radio stations nationwide, and these are mostly concentrated in California, where Latinos are now the majority population.²⁴

Of those Latinos who own a smartphone, 78 percent use it to access news and information, slightly more than their white counterparts (74 percent). Those who use smartphones are more likely to discover news through search engines, news aggregators, and social networking platforms than those who do not use smartphones.²⁵



Figure 3. Device ownership among Latino households



SOURCE: Fuller, B., Lizárraga, J.R., Gray, J.H. (2015). Digital media and Latino families: New channels for learning, parenting, and local organizing. New York: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop. <http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/publication/digital-media-and-latino-families-new-channels-for-learning-parenting-and-organizing/>

Research provides us with a clearer picture of how low-income Latinos access and use digital technology. Immigrant Latino parents report less digital technology in their homes than all other groups, including U.S.-born Latino parents. About 4 in 10 immigrant Hispanic parents have no computer (37 percent compared with under 20 percent for other groups), and 16 percent do not own a mobile device.²⁶

Two recent reports by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop describe the nuances of access to the internet for some Latino households. Even in households with desktop computers or smartphones, regular access to the internet may be limited for a variety of reasons. For example, some users with more restrictive wireless plans may find their service interrupted temporarily when monthly data limits have been reached; others may have less screen time to check email when family members depend on shared devices.²⁷

Since 2 out of 3 Hispanic children live in families that are either in or near poverty,²⁸ providers should not assume that low-income Latino families—even if they have a computer or smartphone—will have full access to the internet.

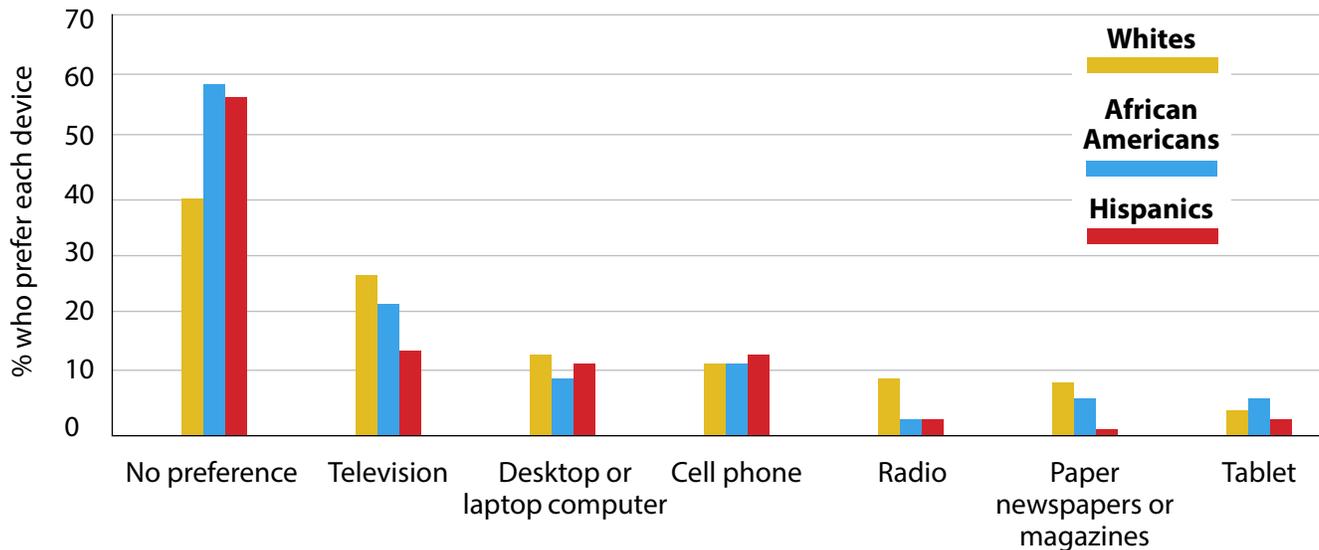
Build outreach strategies based on Latino families’ news-consuming habits

Knowing what news sources Latinos rely on and use can give us an idea of how they use technology, and the online sources that they consider reliable. Most news media, or others who produce information for the public, use multiple platforms to display and disseminate their content, such as printing the information, putting it online, and providing it for television or radio programs. For example, a local newspaper will produce a story for their print edition, but also format the story for their website. A person may rely on a local radio station for information about the community, but may access the radio station’s reports online through the station’s website because they trust this particular source of information.



When developing an outreach strategy to reach the communities you serve, it is helpful to know both the technologies your audiences use to access information (telephone, radio, TV, and social media) and their trusted sources of information (specific radio stations, newspapers, TV stations, websites).

Figure 4. Television is the device most people in the United States prefer to use to get news



SOURCE: The Media Insight Project. (2014). The Personal News Cycle: A Focus on African American and Hispanic News Consumers. The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Across racial and ethnic groups, local television news is the most popular news source, used by more people than any other. Overall, 82 percent of U.S. adults say they got news from local television news outlets in the last week, either on television or online.²⁹

Traditional news sources such as television and radio remain more popular among Latinos than they do among the general public. We also know that 50 percent of Latinos rely on Hispanic-specific news sources for information about their community and issues of relevance to the community.³⁰

The continued popularity of TV and radio, despite the growing use of the internet to access news and information, is not unique to Latinos. However, providers looking to reach low-income Latino parents should keep in mind that Latino parents who do not have regular access to the internet turn to local radio and television shows on a daily basis to keep informed about school closings, school lunch menus, weather and traffic concerns for commuters, among many other topics.

Parents in our focus groups reported watching a combination of local television channels and the Spanish-language stations Univision and Telemundo. Parents also

I watch "Buenos Días D.C." to learn if school is cancelled, and about the traffic. I put the morning news on at 5:00 or 7:00 or 9:00. If it is snowing then I can find out the list of school closings.
(Focus Group Participant)



reported that they look to television for educational programming in addition to entertainment and news. Some examples these parents described included parenting programs that address how to handle a difficult child, a documentary series on what to expect during childbirth, and cooking shows. They also reported watching TV to learn about issues of concern in the local community.

Most providers agreed that TV and radio are effective ways to reach out to and engage Latino parents, and many relayed that they had used either Spanish-language TV or radio at some point to engage the community, and some had been able to develop relationships with Spanish media that had proven critical to successful outreach. One provider of education services to Latino youth explained:

Probably the most important strategy we use is reaching out directly to Latino families, and one of the ways this is facilitated is through interviews on Univision—we have a strong relationship with Univision, they've been a partner with us and they provide a lot of in-kind support to the campaign. Before an upcoming workshop, they bring us in to do a phone-banking segment where we do live interviews on camera. These interviews really help drive people to our events. We do that with Univision two or three times a year.

Granted, having coordinated airtime on a national network, free of charge, may seem out of reach—and some providers reported that radio and television ads were too costly, and that PSAs were not a good return on their investment. However, we also heard from providers who were successfully able to get media coverage without a large budget or having the sponsorship of a large station.

Most providers whose outreach plans include TV or radio either obtained coverage through earned media—developing relationships with local reporters who invite them as guest experts to discuss topics that are relevant to Latino parents, such as early childhood education or domestic violence. From the

Earned media. *Earned media* is coverage you gain by cultivating relationships with news reporters. This cultivation can yield regular access to radio and television spots and interviews.

Paid media. *Paid media* refers to media placements such as TV or radio ads paid for by a service provider. With paid media, you control the message and when it is delivered, unlike in earned media, where editors often determine what is aired and when PSAs run.

perspective of these providers, these TV and radio appearances elicited calls to their offices about their programming, especially from the Spanish-speaking segment of the Latino population.

When possible, tailor your messages to topics Latinos tend to follow

The top three news topics followed most by all groups are traffic, weather, and natural disasters. After these top three, there are some variations among different racial and ethnic groups. Hispanics show greater interest in science and technology and in school and education topics than their white and African American counterparts.



Table 1. Differences in the news topics people in the United States follow, by race and ethnicity

	% Whites	% African Americans	% Hispanics
Traffic and weather	82	78	88
Your local town or city	81	72	64*
National government and politics	78	63*-	38*
The environment and natural disasters	77	76	81
Business and the economy	71	73	53*
Foreign and international news	70	45*	61
Health and medicine	66	74	65
Crime and public safety	65	76	75
Social issues like abortion, race, and gay rights	62	40*	44*
Science and technology	58	45-	67
Schools and education	52+	73	62
Lifestyle topics such as food, exercise, or parenting	46	53	46
Sports	44	62	51
Art and culture	36	31	30
Entertainment and celebrities	32	46	54*

SOURCE: Media Insight Project. (2014).

Note: * Indicates significant difference compared to whites at $p < .05$; + indicates significant difference compared to African Americans at $p < .05$; - indicates significant difference compared to Hispanics at $p < .05$

Familiarize yourself with local language preferences for accessing news and information

We know from research that there has been a threefold increase in Latinos ages 5 and older who live in households where Spanish is spoken. In addition, English proficiency has increased. We also know that half of all Latinos seek news and information in both languages.³¹

A large majority (82 percent) of the parents in our focus groups were immigrants and monolingual Spanish speakers. Most focus group participants reported using Spanish when searching for information online, in hopes that the results they bring up will be in Spanish. There was also acknowledgment in the focus groups that finding websites with information in Spanish can be challenging. As one parent told us, “Some web pages only have the homepage in Spanish and the rest are in English and that isn’t so great for me.”

We use Facebook and Twitter and we are semi-active on Instagram. We also have a presence on LinkedIn and Google Plus. We run ads on Facebook, which helps us reach new people. Sometimes we do this in Spanish for something very specific, like the legal clinics that we offer. When we have a flyer in Spanish we post that on the Facebook event page so that people can access it, and distribute it if they know someone that needs it in Spanish. (Provider, D.C. Metro Area)



Incorporate social media

Popular media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Instagram were made possible by the emergence of personal home computers and the ability to link those computers via the Internet. In only a few short decades, social media has become ubiquitous around the globe. Yet even as providers embrace social media to reach their audiences, not all households have access to the internet. As mentioned above, many lower-income families still lack a home computer, and even in homes with computers, there are still barriers to going online.

Most organizations we interviewed use Facebook as a way to raise awareness about their programs and services. Providers in different parts of the country who serve different Latino populations—including an early child development center and a maternal health program—told us that they did not reach their primary audiences through social media, though they still maintain active Facebook pages. These providers use Facebook and other social media to engage with supporters and advocates, who tend to be college-educated and professional Latinos—some of them former recipients of their services. The providers mentioned that staying in contact through Facebook with supporters and advocates helps trigger collective actions, such as contacting their state representative about pending legislation. Social media is also useful for short-term fundraising campaigns to meet a specific goal, like paying for a student field trip or purchasing team uniforms.

Providers should carefully adapt their social media strategies to the community they are serving. Social media is particularly beneficial when reaching out to a younger population, as well as to those Latino households in medium-to-higher income brackets. In addition, social media offers an effective and low-

cost way of staying engaged with peer service providers and building visibility among other stakeholders such as policymakers, reporters, and funders.

We use Facebook and MailChimp, and at one point we had videos on our website. And yes, there are Latinas who engage with us electronically—but they tend to be the support folks—people who will donate money, volunteer their skills, and come to a fundraising or other event. They typically are not going to be the people who will use services. Our [program staff] have met with people in their cars, people who live in extreme poverty and don't have access to the internet. It's important to be intentional about how you use the internet and who you are trying to communicate with. The real heart of our work happens in person, not online. (Provider, Austin)

About half of Hispanic adults get news and information or news headlines from social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook, but their degree of reliance on social media varies greatly across a number of factors: age, place of birth, preferred language, education, and income.³² Just as with those who get their news from the Internet, the share of Hispanics who gets their news and information from social media is greatest among younger Latinos. About 70 percent of Latinos ages 18 to 29 say they get news or headlines from social networking sites. By contrast, only 10 percent of Latino adults ages 65 and older do the same.³³ We expect the percent of older Latinos getting news from social media sites to increase as these sites increase the distribution and promotion of news on their platforms.

The majority of providers we interviewed use social media to raise awareness about their programs and services—though not necessarily to connect with their target audiences.

Rather, providers in different parts of the country who serve

different Latino populations felt it was important to maintain an active online presence, to raise awareness about their programs and services, to improve recruitment and advocacy efforts, and to fundraise.

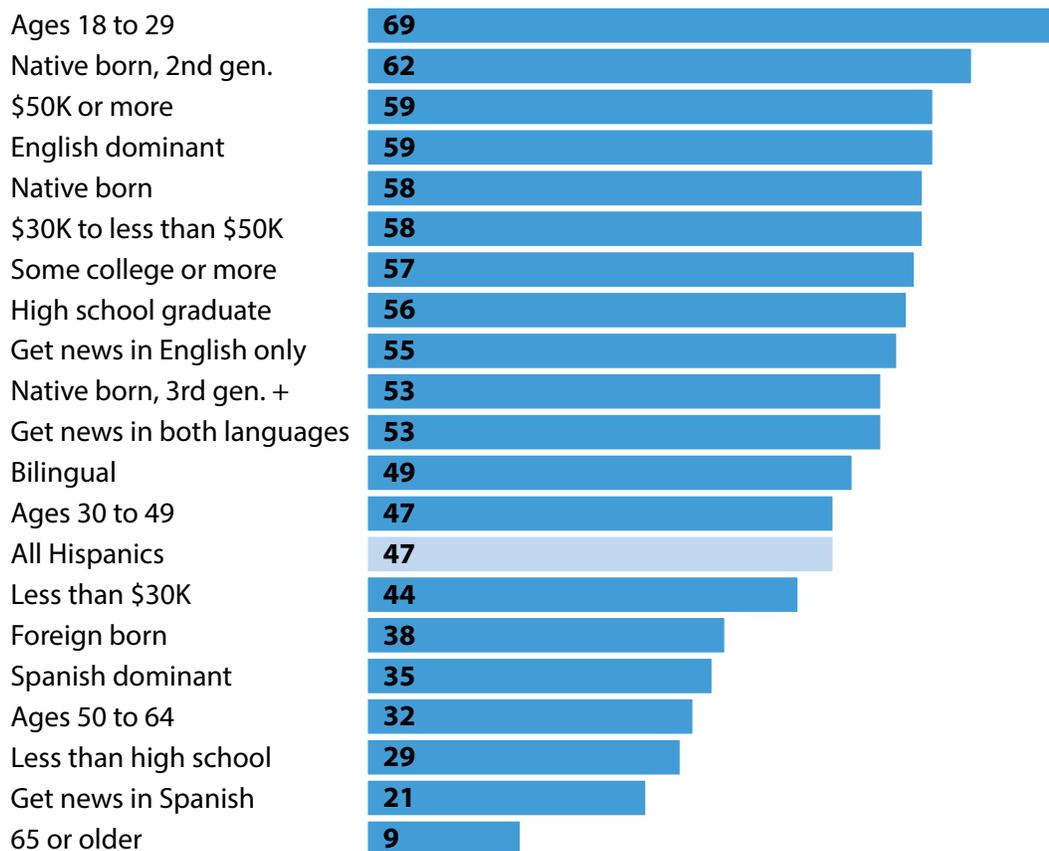
Parents in our focus groups who said they used social media reported using Facebook to keep in touch with family and friends. Fewer parents reported using Facebook as a method to get information or to learn about services, and this varied from community to community.



Providers would do well to remember that the Latino audiences most active on social media today—that is, Latino youth—will reach adulthood and become parents themselves over the next decade, and some will move into leadership roles in their communities. This makes it likely that the next generation of Latino parents and families will not only be more active on social media, they will engage in the new “cyber commons” and use new technologies in new ways, and share a new kind of technological literacy and cultural communication with their children.

Figure 5. Latinos’ news consumption and social networking sites

% of Hispanic adults saying they ever get news or news headlines from social media websites such as Facebook or Twitter



Note: N=1,765. Question was asked only of those who use social networking sites. Responses of “never” and “don’t know/refused” not shown. “Foreign born” refers to persons born outside of the United States to parents neither of whom was a U.S. citizen and also refers to those born in Puerto Rico. Those with high school diplomas include persons who have attained its equivalent, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Income figures refer to average annual family income.

SOURCE: Lopez, M.H., Gonzalez-Barrera, A., and Patten, E. (2013). “Social Networking.” Closing the Digital Divide: Latinos and Technology Adoption. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.



A newer trend for nonprofits using social media is to place targeted ads. While there is still insufficient evidence on which audiences are most likely to respond to online ad campaigns, one provider we interviewed reported positive results using targeted ads on Facebook to attract new audiences (teens and the parents of teens). This advertising may represent a cost-effective opportunity for outreach to specific groups of individuals based on zip codes, age, gender, and other demographic information. These paid posts can be tracked, much like web traffic, to determine how many views they generate and whether they lead to the viewer accessing the information promoted in the posting.

We are also trying to engage through social media. We have active pages on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, but we find that those people who connect on social media tend to be professionals, like college counselors seeking information, and not so much the students.
(Provider, Los Angeles)

Framework component 5: Data collection and assessment

Gauge the success of your communication outreach

Did your communication outreach efforts accomplish what you intended? In order to assess the success of your communication strategy, you will need to track the response to each outreach component. It is important to identify your measures of communication success, or metrics, when you are developing your objectives. As a service provider, you want to be able to demonstrate how your communication work advances your mission. Your objectives should provide direction and identify the results that you will use to determine the success of your communication outreach.

Metrics could include the number of phone calls received after disseminating flyers at a community event. Or you can track metrics on website visits, engagement through social media, the audience reach of a community newspaper or other media outlet, or the number of people who register for your services. This information will help you determine what works best and how to improve future communication efforts. In addition, funders require and expect for you to keep track of the outputs (the actions that you take) and outcomes (the impacts to your objective) of communication efforts that they support.

Example outputs and outcomes that reflect engagement with your audience:

- **Output 1:** Distribute flyers at a community event that announces a deadline for registering for a particular service.
- **Outcome 1:** The number of people who called to find out about the service after having seen the flyer.
- **Output 2:** Identify and meet with five community leaders to seek their partnership in communicating the value of early care and education practices for helping prepare children for kindergarten.
- **Outcome 2:** The number of community leaders who actually helped get the word out to your target audiences.
- **Output 3:** Purchase two paid posts during a particular time period through Facebook to target Latino families with children in the zip codes served by your organization.



- **Outcome 3:** The number of people who viewed the post and clicked on the link to your content.

Use metric-measuring software like Google Analytics

For organizations that rely on websites, there are a number of analytic tools, such as Google Analytics, that provide a wealth of information about who comes to your website and what pages they view. (See attachment, Google Analytics) These tools help you answer the following questions:

- Are you reaching your intended audiences via your website? Google Analytics can provide information on gender, age, and geographic locations of your site visitors.
- Are you providing the right information to lead your audiences to your services? For example, how many pages were viewed about your services or how many people completed an online form for more information?
- Is the information being provided in a format and language that is accessible and appropriate for your audiences? If you offered materials in English and Spanish, which language was selected most often by your web visitors?

The answers to these and related questions can help guide service organizations in the development and maintenance of an effective web platform. Web analytics data include visitors' demographic information and their behaviors on a website, such as how they found the website, what they clicked on, and how long they stayed on the site.

Google Analytics is a service that generates detailed statistics about a website's visitors and their behaviors. This service examines data from a specified time period and provides information about visitors to a website, such as their language preferences and geographic location, the type of information that they search for most often, their use of search filters, their path through different levels of webpages and website content, and the technologies (mobile phones, tablets, etc.) they use to access the site. This information helps organizations better understand their audiences' usage patterns, and improve their website based on those patterns.

What if your objective is not easily measured?

Not everything lends itself to numerical measures. For example, if you want to gauge how parents respond to a training session with your center, you might want to consider using a feedback survey or interview in which participants can share what they have learned and how they intend to use this knowledge in their own lives.

Research as a path to organizational growth

Funders are also interested in your results, and will frequently fund formal evaluations of your programs. Evaluations are often conducted by research organizations, or by researchers based in universities, who are



experts in working with programs to determine measures of success and using the findings as a guide for growth and improvement. Program evaluations can be used to guide your organization's growth and to increase its impact on the communities you serve.

Next Steps

Communication plans are a roadmap for reaching and engaging with the audiences that matter to your work. Monitoring the impact of your outreach, as part of your communication plan, will help you improve future efforts. Your communication plan should be flexible, though, and able to be adapted as you identify the most effective approaches.

For each of your organizational initiatives, you should have a communication plan. You should also have one for the organization as a whole. At least once a year, revisit and revise!





Recommendations for service providers

Hispanics, like the general population, access information from a variety of sources. Service providers should therefore use multiple communication channels to reach their audiences. This means learning how and where your target audiences prefer to get their information, including direct person-to-person communication, traditional news media, and social media. “Traditional news media” includes both Spanish and English TV and radio networks, and newspapers (print and digital).

1. Know your audience; take time up front to understand their backgrounds and preferences.

Base your communication plan on information you gather about the community you serve. Given the varied backgrounds and experiences of Latino populations, individual communities will receive and interpret messages about services in different ways, and they will respond to these messages in different ways as well.



2. Improve your ability to engage with your community about issues that are relevant to them. Assess the needs of your local Hispanic communities.

Conducting a needs assessment is a standard practice for the development of social service programs. A needs assessment can inform your communication strategy by deepening your knowledge of the target audience. The needs assessment can help identify the physical and knowledge barriers that deter families from accessing education, health, and social services. The service provider may or may not be in the immediate control of these barriers, but an awareness of them can lead to innovative solutions or new partnerships that will improve the providers' reach. A needs assessment may also uncover services gaps where the community's needs are not being met.

3. Many Latinos have strong preferences about how they self-identify—take note of their preferences in your outreach efforts.

While most national news outlets, government agencies such as the U.S. Census Bureau, and research organizations like the Pew Research Center have opted to use “Latino” and “Hispanic” interchangeably, we recommend that you let the Hispanic families and individuals you serve self-identify as they see fit. The community targeted by a specific service provider may have a preference for one or neither of these terms. A majority of Hispanic adults surveyed in 2011 preferred to identify themselves by their family's country of origin, i.e., “Puerto Rican,” “Honduran,” or “Mexican,” rather than by the umbrella terms “Hispanic” or “Latino.”³⁴

4. To establish productive relationships, build on the respect Hispanic communities have for family.

From the smallest unit of the family to the broader society, Latinos value community. Taking time to engage with Hispanic families and displaying how much you value their participation can support their continued use of services.

5. Direct person-to-person contact is best when communicating with Latino families.

Not surprisingly, personal contact remains the most direct and effective way for service providers and educators to communicate with Hispanic families. Face-to-face communication allows for a level of interaction and an exchange of information that few, if any, alternatives can match. Most of the service providers we spoke with emphasized the importance of personal contact, including door-to-door visits, in-person distribution of flyers to people on neighborhood streets with heavy pedestrian use, meet-ups with parents and students at schools and school bus stops, and attendance at community events. While these are often labor-intensive approaches, they have been proven to be effective.

6. Partner with well-respected community leaders to improve outcomes for Hispanic families.

To gain buy-in from Hispanic families, consider engaging and partnering with well-respected community members. In addition to civic community leaders, it may be important to reach out to informal influencers as well, including relied-upon community medical providers and faith leaders.³⁵ These partnerships can serve as a means of supporting families as they continue using a service, and can also help programs locate and recruit others in need of services. Organizations who serve children are often trusted community members and a conduit to Hispanic families.

7. Leverage “influencers” who can open doors to the community you work with.

Local influencers and peers can help open communication with Latino families in the community. An influencer or opinion leader is someone who families turn to for advice and counsel. They are individuals (either by personal acquaintance or reputation) who have the credibility to effectively give advice, affect public opinion, or call for action.



8. Some Hispanic families may not welcome phone calls or text messaging—instead, build your campaign using other forms of direct communication, so that phone calls and text messaging can be used to complement and reinforce these other channels.

Our research found that texting and phone calls complement and reinforce other communication outreach efforts. Focus group participants agreed that they prefer face-to-face interactions, but that phone calls can help them engage more directly with the provider. This was particularly the case for participants with low-to-no literacy skills, especially if they are contacted by someone who is bilingual. Be sure to ask participants for their consent to be contacted by phone or text messaging.

9. Reach Latinos through the media channels they rely on most—and most Latinos rely on traditional media like television and radio for information and entertainment.

While Latinos, especially the younger generations, are increasingly reliant on social media, most Hispanic households still rely primarily on traditional media such as television and radio for information and entertainment. Since large-scale advertising campaigns are not always feasible, consider how your organization can partner with popular local newspapers and television and radio programs to feature your organization's work. Also consider how your organization can provide a voice in coverage about social services and their impact on the Latino communities.

Spanish-language media and local channels are popular news sources among Hispanics. Advertising spots or public service announcements (PSAs) do not need to be limited to the timing of news shows; with a bit of research it is possible to determine which news and entertainment programming hours are favored by your target audiences. Given the popularity of *telenovelas*, placing announcements during those programming hours may help reach a significant number of Latinos.

10. Take advantage of social media, especially when reaching out to younger Latinos—but do your homework before launching a social media campaign aimed at other generations, particularly if they are low-income and/or immigrants.

The internet and social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have helped establish new ways of connecting with others and creating communities. Like most groups, Hispanics increasingly use these networks to stay in touch and engage with family and friends, and to connect with social and professional groups. Organizations should consider how a social media component may fit into their outreach and communication strategy. If the target audience is active on social media, it can be a cost-effective way to communicate program information, develop rapport, and build community.

11. For more user-friendly websites, make sure they are mobile-optimized (many Latino families are smartphone dependent, and only access the Internet on mobile devices) and consider imbedded video shorts (in Spanish &/or English as appropriate) to inform users about your services and how to reach you directly.

Latinos use digital technology to consume news at similar rates as other racial and ethnic populations.³⁶ However, many low-income Hispanic families, including more recent immigrant families, are frequently “smartphone dependent,” with limited options for Internet access apart from their smartphone. Mobile-optimized websites, which are designed to work as well on a mobile device as a desktop computer, will give Latinos greater access to your organization's services. When sites are not mobile optimized, they can be harder to see and use on a smartphone, which will hinder the delivery of information. In addition, popular search engines such as Google prioritize search results for sites that are optimized for mobile access.



12. Consider the best language to reach and engage your target community—with so many Hispanic households composed of both Spanish- and English-dominant speakers, the future is bilingual.

What language will best reach the communities you work with needs to be thought through carefully and driven by the audiences you are targeting. For example, since English-proficiency remains low among newer immigrant families, programs in areas with high immigrant populations may need messages entirely in Spanish to adequately inform and engage them. At the same time, there are growing numbers of Latinos who are English-proficient and English-dominant. Researching language use in the community you serve can ensure that your communication strategies are designed for clarity and effective messaging.

13. Carefully choose how best to incorporate appropriate cultural elements.

Using Spanish can show a respect for Hispanic culture and may be the most effective way to reach some groups within Latino communities, but additional cultural elements are essential to this process. When using graphic elements on your website, in brochures, or on social media, make sure that they are relatable to the Hispanic audiences you intend to reach. Due to the diversity among Hispanic communities, different cultural elements are not always shared. Using the images, sounds, and other hallmarks of specific Latino communities in your service area, can influence your audience's ability to relate to your organization's messages.

14. Ensure your materials are reading-level appropriate for the specific community you serve.

In the context of diverse Latino populations, with a wide variation in education and literacy in either language, it is particularly important to ensure your materials are reading-level appropriate. **Plain language** refers to written communication that is clear and accessible. Short sentences, active voice, and simple vocabulary all help keep materials appropriate for a range of reading and literacy levels. **Reading level** determines whether your written materials—whether in Spanish or English—will be easily understood by the intended audience. The average reading level in the United States for native English speakers is eighth grade.

15. Track your results, adjust your strategies, and improve your communication and engagement.

Keeping track of your communication efforts allows you to adjust your strategy as you learn what methods work best for your target audience and program goals. Setting objectives at the outset of your campaign allows you to track your success and evaluate the effectiveness and learning points for each component of your communication plan.

16. Learn from each outreach strategy: think critically about which components of your strategy were the most effective and which were least effective, and why.

By evaluating each step of your communication strategy you will gain perspective about the communication process overall. Lessons learned throughout an outreach campaign enable you to refine and improve your communication strategies going forward.



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Appendix:

Optimizing Websites to Reach and Engage Hispanic Families

How Service Providers Can Use Web Analytics Data to Understand and Better Serve Latino Audiences

By 2050, Latino children are expected to represent one third of all children in the United States – a similar percentage as white children. Given this growing share of children who are Hispanic or Latino, and frequently from low-income families, it is critical that organizations providing services to support children’s healthy development optimize their communications to Hispanic audiences. Latino children’s development and educational trajectory will have an important impact on the country’s future.

Each new platform for communication—from the telephone, to broadcast media, to digital platforms—has offered different, and often a more efficient and effective route, to intended audiences. But they involve a learning curve. Organizations now rely heavily on their websites for sharing information about their organization and service and engaging with their important audiences. . But how do organizations know whether their intended audiences are actually accessing their web content? Are organizations providing the right information to lead their target audiences to needed services? Is the information being provided in a format and language that is accessible and appropriate for these audiences?

A number of analytical tools offer organizations the possibility of answering these and related questions. Information that can help guide service organizations in the development and maintenance of an effective web platform. Web analytics data include visitors’ demographic information, their behaviors on a website, such as how they found the website, what they clicked on, and how long they stay on the site.

This report provides an overview of available analytical tools, explains the relevance of the data these tools provide for service providers, and offers guidance on how to access these tools. Google Analytics, in particular, is one of the most widely used traffic analysis tools for websites. It captures data that can help organizations maximize access to information and services.

First, we introduce implementation and analysis of data from Google Analytics. We then describe complimentary tools for analyzing data captured from the web. Throughout, we provide examples relevant to organizations providing services to Hispanic families and children.

Google Analytics: Implementation and Strategies for Analysis

Google Analytics is a service offered by Google that generates detailed statistics about a website’s visitors and their behaviors. This service examines data from a certain time period, and provides information about visitors using the website, such as language and geographic location, type of information that has been searched for most often, how visitors have used the search filters, how visitors have gone through different levels of webpages and website



content, patterns in paths that visitors have taken on the website, and the kinds of access technologies (mobile phones, tablets, etc.) they used to access the site. Such information is valuable in that it helps organizations better understand usage patterns that can lead to improvements to the website based on those patterns.

1. Implementation of Google Analytics

1.1. Integrating Google Analytics in the website

There are two ways to integrate Google Analytics into a website. The first way is by taking advantage of Google Tag Manager. Google Tag Manager is a free service that helps users add and update website tags—small bits of website code that measure actions on your site, and user information—and stores the data these tags collect in Google Analytics. This approach requires four steps:

- (1) creating a Google Tag Manager account,
- (2) setting up Google Tag Manager on the website,
- (3) adding the Google Analytics Tag to the website backend r using Google Tag Manager, and
- (4) publishing the container.

Google recommends this approach because using Google Tag Manager simplifies tag management for users who are not IT professionals. In addition, using Google Tag Manager makes it easier to add custom tags to the website and configure Google Analytics tracking.

The other way to use Google Analytics is to add the tracking codes directly into the HTML code, the language used to code for web content, of every page of the website. These tracking codes are available in Google Analytics, in the *Admin* section, under *Tracking Info*. If users only want to add basic Google Analytics tracking code to the website, this is the easiest approach.

1.2. Tracking demographic characteristics

By tracking visitors' demographic characteristics, website managers are able to better understand who the visitors are by their age, gender, and interests. This information can help guide the hosting organization in the development of website content aimed at better serving those audiences they are reaching and those they would like to reach. To implement this service, analysts must first update Google Analytics to support Advertising Features, and then enable the reports from either the *Admin* tab or the *Reporting* tab.

1.3. Tracking website search patterns

By implementing the *Site Search* feature, analysts will be able to obtain data of visitors' search terms and thereby understand which types of information have been searched for the most and how frequently visitors have used the search feature. The site search feature enables organizations to understand website visitors' preferences and need for information, and can help them decide which content to prioritize in their website architecture. This feature can be easily turned on in the *Admin* tab.^a

^a However, please note that if the searching URLs of the websites do not contain site search parameters, virtual pageviews will likely be employed to insert search parameters for Google Analytics. For example, if the search query is an environment variable, e.g. %searchterm, then this variable can be used as a virtual pageview (with a query parameter "q" as if this were a physical URL). That is, codes below can be added:

```
<script type="text/javascript">
var gaJsHost = (("https:" == document.location.protocol) ? "https://ssl." : "http://www.");
document.write(unescape("%3Cscript src='" + gaJsHost + "google-analytics.com/ga.js?type='text/javascript'%3E%3C/script%3E"));
</script>
<script type="text/javascript">
try {
var pageTracker = _gat._getTracker("UA-XXXXXXXX-1");
pageTracker._trackPageview('/site search/?q=%searchterm');
}catch(err) {}</script>
```

Reaching and Engaging with Hispanic Communities:

A Research-Informed Communication Guide for Nonprofits, Policymakers, and Funders



1.4. Measuring page scrolling

By adding *Scroll Depth*, a Google Analytics page-scrolling plugin, to their website, analysts can measure how far visitors are scrolling on each of the webpages. The plugin monitors whether users scroll down 25 percent, 50 percent, 75 percent, or 100 percent of page. Analysts can also track when specific elements on the page are scrolled into view. Understanding scroll depth of webpages could help the organization prioritize content placement on webpages, or determine how much information should be placed on a webpage. The plugin can be downloaded from Scroll Depth's website at <http://scrolldepth.parsnip.io>.

2. Insights from Google Analytics data

After Google Analytics service has been incorporated in the website of interest, analysts can collect and analyze Google Analytics data using a Google Analytics account. Using a preset data range, Google Analytics data is made up of *metrics* and *dimensions* of the website visiting information. Dimensions represent characteristics of website users, such as language or location. Metrics are numerical measurements within each dimension. For example, for the dimension *language*, corresponding metrics may include number of visitors, number of visits, and duration of visitors for each language.

Dimensions and metrics can be combined in certain ways, but not in others. Each metric and dimension has a scope, either of visitors, visits, or actions. If dimensions and metrics do not share a scope, they cannot typically be combined. For example, the dimension *gender* indicates genders of visitors and hence has a scope of visitors. This dimension can only be used with visitor-level metrics such as number of visits during a certain time range. It would not be logical to combine this dimension with metrics with a scope of visit like number of users during a certain time range.

In this chapter, we will first explain how to set a particular date range in Google Analytics. We will then explain how key metrics are defined in Google Analytics. After that, we will explain elements of dimensions and how to combine these elements to get insights from Google Analytics data.

2.1. Setting a time range for Analytics data

Google Analytics allows users to track data over a custom date range. Google Analytics automatically creates and updates data tables on a daily basis. Analysts can use the data range selector at the top right of each report page to specify a data range and, optionally, to compare that range to another one.

2.2. Metrics

Google Analytics reports on a variety of metrics related to characteristics of website visitors and their actions. Here are several key metrics:

Users. Analytics data include the number of visitors who have visited the website at least once within the selected data range. Users include those who are new and returning visitors to the website.

Sessions. Analytics data also include the number of sessions during the preset time range. A session represents a visit to the site involving browsing and/or interactive activities while on the site (such as watching videos in webpages), ending when there has been a period of 30 minutes of inactivity.

Percent of new sessions. This metric provides an estimate of the percentage of first time visits to the site during the specified date range.

Avg. session duration. The average session duration provides an estimate of the average length of a session.



Bounce rate. The bounce rate is the percentage of single-page visits—visits in which the visitor left the website site from the page they entered on, without interacting with the other webpages.

Pages / session. Pages per session measures the average page depth, meaning the average number of webpages viewed during a session. Repeated views of a single page are counted as multiple pages.

Pageviews. Pageviews represents the total number of webpages viewed. Repeated views of a single webpage are counted as multiple pages.

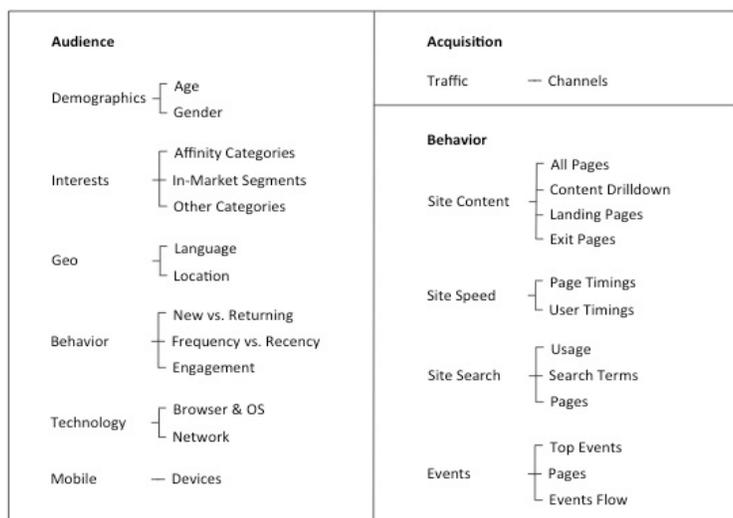
Avg. time on page. This metric describes the average amount of time users have spent viewing a specific page or a specific set of pages.

2.3. Dimensions

Google Analytics offers a large number of dimensions to capture characteristics and behaviors of website visitors. As shown in the figure below, these dimensions are included in the Google Analytics data as three sets of reports: audience, acquisition, and behavior. In this section, we will describe elements in each of these three sets.

2.3.1. Audience: Characteristics of website visitors

2.3.1.1. Demographic characteristics



Google Analytics' *Audience* reports include the *Demographics* report, which provides information about the age and gender of website visitors. Visitors within a defined timeframe are categorized into six age groups: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+. It is worth noting here that children (people below age 18) are not included in this set of data. Visitors are also categorized by gender, including male and female. The estimated gender and age of a visitor are based on his or her activity on other websites: "When someone visits a website that has partnered with the Google Display Network, Google stores a number in their browsers (using a "cookie") to remember their visits. This number uniquely identifies a web browser on a specific computer, not a specific person. Browsers may be associated with a demographic category, such as gender, age range, or parental status, based on the sites that were visited" (from https://support.google.com/adwords/answer/2580383?hl=en&utm_id=ad). Please note that Google Analytics provides such demographic information based on other websites visited, but does not share what those other websites are. Also, note



that this is an estimate since it cannot measure every person that visits a site. People who clear their cookies frequently are not easily tracked by these demographic tools.

Examining such demographic information is one of the essential steps of understanding website visitors, and can enable organizations to refine their websites and plan marketing strategies accordingly.

2.3.1.2. Interests

Along with demographic characteristics, Google Analytics' *Audience* reports also provide information about website visitors' interests, which they have expressed through their online browsing and purchasing activities. Specifically, this report identifies visitors by *affinity categories* in terms of lifestyle, such as "Family-Focused" and "News Junkies & Avid Readers." In addition, this report identifies visitors by *in-market segment* according to their purchase interests, such as "Real Estate/Residential Properties" and "Baby & Children's Products/Childcare & Education/Early Childhood Education." Moreover, this section provides a specific, detailed view of the users in other categories. For example, while affinity categories include the category "Family-Focused," other categories include a category of "News/Weather" and a category of "People & Society/Family & Relationships/Family/Parenting/Child Care." This set of information gives context for expanding advertising into related markets and for focusing advertising on the kinds of users who demonstrate likelihood of visiting the website.

2.3.1.3. Language and location

The *Audience* reports from Google Analytics also include the *Geo* report, listing language settings of browsers through which visitors have visited the website, as well as their geographic locations (from continent to city). This set of information is very valuable because, for example, it provides insights such as how frequently webpages in English (or Spanish) are visited through Spanish browsers (i.e. the browsers language preferred setting is Spanish) and whether users from geographic areas with large Hispanic populations exhibit interest in the website. Knowing the language of the visitors' browsers can help the hosting organization determine the percentage of Spanish-dominant vs. English-dominant visitors and adapt their content accordingly.

2.3.1.4. Engagement

The *Audience* reports from Google Analytics also include the *Behavior* section, which lists the percentage of new versus returning visitors, frequency and recency of visits, and engagement information. This section is usually of great value because it provides a measure of returning visitors and the extent to which the website and/or organization encourages first-time users to return.

2.3.1.5. Technology usage

Typically a website is available on a variety of platforms/devices; therefore, attention must be paid to website functionality and accessibility across all platforms. The *Audience* reports from Google Analytics identify technological platforms that visitors use to access the website in the *Technology* and *Mobile* reports. Examples of types of such technical platforms include browsers, operation systems, Internet Service Providers (ISP), screen sizes, and mobile devices. This information enables organizations to plan website development and design and to fix bugs, if any, that show up on certain platforms, so as to make sure that the website can be easily accessed on any kind of devices. With the growth in

2.3.2. Acquisition: Behaviors of website visitors before they visit the website

The *Acquisition* report in Google Analytics provides channels that have brought visitors to the website. Such channels include direct traffic, referrals, social media, paid search, and organic (unpaid) search. If visitors have



been brought to the website through web search activities, this report also provides keywords that visitors have used when searching. Such information is helpful for search engine optimization.

2.3.3. Behaviors: Activities of website visitors when they are exploring the website

The *Behavior* report in Google Analytics is focused on content, performance, searchability, and interactivity of the website. It includes basic characteristics for each page and area of the website, site loading speed, information about how the site search is being used, and how interactive elements (e.g., Flash and Alex) on the website have been used.

2.3.3.1. Site content

The *Site Content* report provides basic metrics for each webpage of the website. Within Site Content, the *All Pages* report shows traffic metrics for each webpage on the website. The *Content Drilldown* data shows the same information, but presented in the order of how the website has been organized. Data from the *Landing Pages* report includes pages on which visitors entered the website. And data from the *Exit Pages* report includes pages that have been the final page of a session. Information of this report is valuable in that it helps organizations understand which pages are leading users to the site, and which pages are either giving them the information they were looking for such that they can leave the site, or leading them to believe that the site is no longer useful for their current needs.

2.3.3.2. Site Speed

The *Site Speed* report shows how quickly users are able to see and interact with content. It includes three aspects of latency, or the time between when a user performs an action, and when the action is complete. The *Page Timings* report shows the page-load time for pageviews of the website. The *Speed Suggestions* report offers specific advice about how an individual webpage's load times might be improved. The *User Timings* report provides execution speed or load time of any discrete hit, event, or user interaction that the analyst would want to track. This set of information is very helpful because analysts can identify areas that need improvement, and then track the extent of those improvements.

2.3.3.3. Site Search

For websites with a search bar, the *Site Search* report provides basic metrics for analysts to find out how successful users are when they search the website. Specifically, within Site Search, the *Usage* report directly compares the percentage of people who have used the search bar against percent of those who have not used the search function. *Search Terms* records words and phrases that visitors have used in the search box. The *Pages* report lists webpages the user was on when he or she did the search. This information can help organizations understand what users need from the site, and how easily they find it.

2.3.3.4. Events

The *Events* report shows how visitors use interactive elements such as videos and games in the website. Within Events, the *Top Events* report shows the total number of times the event happened on the website, and the number of unique events (the number of times a new visitor used the element, as opposed to the same visitor using the element multiple times). The *Pages* report describes event visits for each page. And, the *Events Flow* report visualizes the order in which users trigger the events on the website. This is good for gauging performance of certain types of events, like average levels achieved in a game or seconds of video watched.



2.4. Approaches

As is described in previous sections, Google Analytics offers a comprehensive set of elements to capture website visitors' characteristics and behaviors. However, most of the time, these elements by themselves do not provide valuable information. Analysts may not want to analyze an entire set of website visitors, but instead, may want to "purify" the data. Purifying website data for analysis involves approaches such as excluding visitors from the organization that the website is associated with, including a certain set of visitors, comparing the website's performance against the websites of similar organizations, conducting real-time analysis, or running an experiment to test which landing page results in the best performance. These tasks require combination of different sets of elements in metrics and dimensions that we will describe in this section.

2.4.1. Segments

Google Analytics provides Segments to help isolate and analyze subsets of the analytics data. A segment could represent either a subset of sessions (e.g., all sessions that occurred during nights and weekends) or a subset of visitors (e.g., visitors in a particular geographical region). Using the segment function in the Audience, Acquisition, and Behavior reports, analysts could conduct analyses segmenting by filters such as "exactly match," "contains," "ends with," "is one of," etc. For example, by adding a new segment that filters "Internet Service Provider" "Is Not One of" and entering the organization's Internet Service Provider, analysts can exclude data about visitors who work in the organization itself, and understand more accurately who else has visited the website. And, by restricting a new segment that filters sessions on mobile devices, analysts can understand the average session duration for mobile visitors. Examples of other questions that can be answered by using segments include:

- What are specific web visitors (e.g., web visitors who speak Spanish or are from a region with a high percentage of Latinos) looking for?
- What are specific web visitors looking for but cannot find?
- What terms are web visitors using to search in the website?
- What do users need from a particular webpage?
- What percentage of users scroll what percentage down a specific webpage?
- What are patterns of multimedia usage?
- Are there any hotspots in webpages?
- What are patterns of log-in users?
- What are patterns of desktop and mobile users?
- What are patterns of web visitors' behavior after implementing the version of the website targeted toward Latinos? (For this, you would create a cohort segment to conduct Cohort Analysis on a certain group of users who visit the website within a specific time range.)

2.4.2. In-page analytics

Google Analytics provides *In-Page Analytics* in the *Behavior* report. The in-page analytics presents, for any selected webpage, which links get the most attention (i.e., clicks). Specifically, the report presents the selected webpage overlaying with click data, which enumerates the percentage of clicks a particular link receives relative to total clicks on the webpage. This set of data provides valuable information regarding how website visitors have interacted with the website content.



2.4.3. Benchmarking

The *Benchmarking* report provides a productive way to compare the website's visit volume against the standard of the organization's industry. Google Analytics provides over 1,600 industry categories to choose from, including "Education," "Youth Camps," and "Baby Care & Hygiene." Such comparison can potentially help the organization set marketing targets for the website.

2.4.4. Real-time analytics

Google Analytics launched *Real-Time Analytics* in 2011, which allows analysts to monitor activities on the website as they occur, and hence provides insights on how visitors are reacting to marketing strategies such as a Twitter message. A visitor will be included in the real-time analytics data if he or she has triggered an event or pageview within the last five minutes. Real-time analytics data include visitors' location and traffic sources information, as well as a content report including which pages current visitors are spending time on and which events they are interacting with. Real-Time Analytics is great for measuring marketing initiatives that have a temporal nature.

2.4.5. Running experiments of website design

The *Google Analytics Content Experiments* enables analysts to run "experiments" on the website that test which version of a landing page results in the greatest improvement in metrics of interest (e.g., clicking a button to transfer to a Spanish version of the website or signing up for a newsletter). Analysts can test up to 10 variations of a landing page.

Other Website Analytics Tools

Besides Google Analytics, there are many other services aiming to help analysts understand website visitors and their activities. For example, Yahoo offers Web Analytics (web.analytics.yahoo.com), a more simplified, although less comprehensive, tool in comparison to Google Analytics. Yahoo Web Analytics includes a useful approach for real-time data collection, investigating visitors' behaviors and demographics information, and other customized options.

There are also many analytics tools that are complimentary to Google Analytics and that may be useful to organizations aiming to reach Hispanic children and families.

1. Statcounter

Statcounter is a web traffic analysis tool that can provide visitors' IP addresses, which could then be transferred to relatively precise geographical addresses. This is complimentary to Google Analytics, in which the lowest level of visitors' location information is city level.

2. Facebook Insights

If the organization has a Facebook page, Facebook Insights can obtain detailed information about followers' counts, likes, comments, etc.

3. Twitalyzer

If the organization has a Twitter account, it would be valuable to employ Twitalyzer, a free analytics dashboard, to understand the account's impact on followers, retweet level, how often an account replies and engages in conversation, and more.



