How to Work With Hispanic Volunteers

Volunteer? I would love to, but I can’t because I am helping my neighbors.

To understand the concept of volunteerism in the Hispanic community, it is important to understand its cultural context.

Most Hispanic immigrants are from countries whose governments and churches have been responsible for providing the majority of social services to citizens. Therefore, Latinos perceive volunteerism as an activity for the very wealthy who have the means and time to do so. This is why the formal concept of volunteering is often foreign to Hispanic immigrants. However, Latinos do volunteer regularly.

It is just referred to as “helping” rather than volunteering. In the Latino culture, the concept of helping another person is not seen as an activity conducted within a certain period of time, as volunteering is. Hispanics tend to always be open to helping a member of their community when they are in need. Hispanic voluntary actions are often more personalized and informal and less institutionalized, which is why they are often not identified or associated as volunteering. As such, it is better to refer to volunteerism as “helping” the well-being of the community or family unity when discussing volunteerism with Latinos. Additionally, culture-specific values such as familismo — the importance of family — and collectivism have a strong impact in shaping Hispanic models of volunteering. The following sections contain strategies that are tailored to help your organization understand how to effectively reach, recruit and maintain Latino volunteers.
How to Reach Hispanic Volunteers

Effectively reaching and engaging the Latino audience requires a different approach than reaching mainstream audiences – one that takes into account the linguistic and cultural differences.

- **Connect with community members on an individual basis to build solid relationships.** While this process will require time and patience, the bonds and relationships that are established will help to make outreach efforts to the Latino community more efficient and effective.

- **Get to know the community leaders and influencers, including older adults, doctors, and religious leaders.** These individuals are respected and can help make the connection with the rest of the community.

- **While engaging with community leaders and members, listen and learn about the culture and community** as this information will greatly inform outreach efforts.

- **Don’t let language barriers keep you from engaging with the Latino community.** Immerse yourself in the community by spending time at local **fiestas**, shopping centers, and educational events. Additionally, if you have proficiency in Spanish, read the local Latino newspapers (some community papers are bilingual) and monitor local Spanish language radio and TV shows.

**Hispanic Volunteer Story**

Señora Ruiz has regularly scheduled doctor appointments to aid in the management of her diabetes. Usually her daughter, María, is able to take her, but one day her son fell ill and she had to pick him up from school at the time of her mother’s doctor appointment. Señora Ruiz thought she would have to cancel the appointment, but when she mentioned it to her neighbor, Señor Alvarez, he immediately offered to take her to the appointment. Señor Alvarez has known Señora Ruiz since he was a child, so it was only natural for him to offer his assistance in her time of need.

For additional information about the National Hispanic SMP program please contact us 1-866-488-7679 or at nhsmp@nhcoa.org.
Guidelines to Recruit Latino Volunteers

After building the foundation of relationships with the Hispanic community use the following guidelines to motivate and recruit Hispanic volunteers.

- **Use strategies that involve cultural characteristics.** For example, when introducing your organization’s mission, it is important to show how it applies to Hispanics.

- **Extend invitations to potential volunteers through in-person visits or phone calls.** Hispanics do not respond to mass, impersonalized announcements. Therefore it is important to contact potential volunteers on an individual basis, either by phone or in-person.

- **Use Spanish language radio to promote your organization and attract potential volunteers.** The radio is a very popular medium among the Latino community, one that conveys credibility and has the ability to reach large masses.

- **Expect the whole family to attend the volunteer meeting.** Hispanics are family oriented and often attend functions as a group. Be prepared by providing activities for children while parents attend the meeting. It is also important that the male head of the household go to recruitment meetings, as his endorsement is often needed if female family members were to become involved.

- **Choose meeting spaces that are convenient and familiar to the community members, such as churches, schools, cultural centers.**

- **Make meetings social events.** Social interaction is important within the Hispanic community. Allow time for people to visit. Offer beverages and/or food, music, and door prizes if funds allow.
• Deliver information in Spanish if there are a majority of Spanish speakers.
• Stress that their skills and talents will make a difference in their families and their community.

• Initially recruit for short-term assignments. Within the Latino community, help is usually offered in response to immediate needs. Short-term assistance is a familiar pattern. Also, rather than wait for someone to step forward and volunteer, go to people and ask them directly to carry out a particular task.
• Simplify paperwork and explain why it is needed.

Once you have recruited Latino volunteers, it is important to **retain them as volunteers for your organization by listening to and empowering them.** Make them feel that their ideas are good and that their contributions are valuable and appreciated. Additionally:

As with recruitment strategies, volunteer support must **take into account their daily life experiences and cultural influences.**

Create a **welcoming environment** for volunteers.

Find time to visit with volunteers and **reinforce personal relationships** continuously.

**Offer food at volunteer events,** even if it is only a beverage.

Create a **multicultural** office program environment.

**Review program policies and practices** to identify those that might discourage Latino participation.

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