

## The Art of 'Hola'! Gaining Entry into Latino Communities

Working with new cultural communities takes finesse. You need the right combination of access to get in and social smoothness to guide your behavior once you're there.

To obtain the inside story on how best to approach Latino communities and engage them in evaluation activities, we turned to three experts whose organizations have served these communities for a combined total of 85 years: Mary Baum, Project Coordinator of the Social Advocates for Youth (SAY) Program in San Diego (40 years); Jenny Sarmiento, Project Director of Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance, Inc., in Watsonville (20 years); and Judith Strang, Project Director of San Dieguitos for Drug-Free Youth in San Diego (25 years).

### Entering new communities

**Learn about the community you want to work with.** First off, not all Latinos are the same, Jenny notes. "So I would say not to make general statements or assumptions about Latinos." Judi does some initial reconnaissance: "We'll really want to walk the neighborhood a little bit. We want to get kind of a sense of how it feels."

**Collaborate with organizations that are already known and trusted.** "It takes a long time to start brand new and get people to come to you, so you have to go to them where they receive services," says Jenny. Partner with Healthy Start, Second Food Harvest, or other local organizations with a solid history of community service. Mary suggests, "Always be open to sharing your data and information and then [organizations will] be more apt to help participate and get more individuals to participate in surveys." Jenny sums it up, "Somebody who's worked in the community and can understand the dynamics of that community is good, but somebody who lives in the community is even better."

**Don't play politics.** "If [you're] trying to get buy-in from the community, I wouldn't go straight to the politicians," Jenny cautions. Mary says something similar, "[Y]ou have to find the right community groups that are in your area that are reaching out at the community level, not town councils."

**Recruit community members.** To reach into the Latino community, SAY San Diego uses a promotora model. Promotoras are "women from the community that





SAY San Diego's enthusiastic team of promotoras

are interested in the issue, have been impacted by that issue...and want to help." They are trained by the program and then go talk with their neighbors about what can be done about the problem. They also help with data collection. Mary explains, "It's really a fabulous model...[although] it needs to be implemented with the right person, the right information, very structured."

***Speak Spanish and translate materials.*** "The best thing to do is make sure that you have a Spanish speaker and that your

materials are translated into a not-so-primary-level language but not overly technical for the community. Make it really easy to understand -- but not so easy that you're making them feel like you think they're dumb," Mary advises. One other thing -- regardless of what people do for a living or how much education they have, in Spanish use the formal greeting of *usted* instead of *tu*, the familiar form. "It seems very minor, but it's important," Jenny counsels.

### **Getting to evaluation**

***Establish a presence at community events.*** "Have a table [at parades, health fairs, local celebrations, farmers' markets] and have some games, give a few incentives away," Jenny suggests. "For example, if you participate in Earth Day, have an activity -- a craft-making activity -- for the kids, and the parents will stand around and that's when you can ask them to participate in surveys."



Pajaro Valley volunteers and staff join the parade

***Offer incentives.*** Jenny continues, "It's going to be the kids that come to your table to see what you have, so if you have pencils and bookmarks -- the colorful ones with animals and a tobacco-free message in Spanish -- those are really helpful." For the parents, Mary offers a \$10 gift card to Wal-Mart, Target or Albertson's. "You can also give incentives to the CBO for participating!" Jenny recommends. "You can give them a gift certificate to Target that they could use for paper or staples or something....Substance abuse and mental health treatment facilities that are working on contracts and grants [are glad for any financial help]."

***Feed everyone!*** Jenny urges, "If you [plan to meet] after 5 or 6 p.m., you have to have some food." Even when hosting a meeting with community organizations, "You definitely should

have some food, anything to make it worthwhile." Judi says, "[Potential contacts] are always glad to be taken to lunch....It's just such a natural relaxer."

**Provide childcare.** "I think that's a biggie!" says Mary. "Be open to having the meeting with children involved and providing child care. It's definitely a plus."

### **Culture counts**

**Dress appropriately.** "You don't want to dress down," Jenny advises. "We are the professionals. They want to see that they can respect you, and if you're sloppy it really isn't a sign of respect toward them." "Women always need to wear a jacket," Judi suggests. "When you have a jacket on, no matter how casually the rest of you is dressed, it makes the relationship safer, because it still keeps it in a professional mode."



Attend family-oriented events -- and wear a jacket!

"The other thing that you also have to be aware of," Jenny warns, "is to be neutral in the colors that you wear, say, in a community where there are a lot of gang issues."

**Family matters.** "It's always good, particularly in a Latino community, to ask them about their children, because no culture reveres children more than the Latino culture," Judi notes. "They absolutely circle around children

in a way that other cultures don't."

**Be warm and friendly.** Latinos love sociability, Judi points out. "So look them straight in the eye, touch them on the side of the arm, nod a lot, smile a lot. Make sure they know that you're really happy to be where they are. And thank them for what they do in their communities, because most people don't get thanked."

For a lot more useful information on working with Latino communities, check out our *Culture in Evaluation* guide at <http://tobaccoeval.ucdavis.edu/culture.php>.

*Photos by: Mary Anne Enriquez, Nancy Machuca and Beatriz Collazo*