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Growth in Hispanic population should boost philanthropy

by Chris Luna

Recent news reports have outlined the growing Hispanic population in Dallas and its suburbs. According to the 2000 Census, Dallas' Hispanic population has doubled since 1990, now comprising 35.6 percent of the population, and making it the city's largest single ethnic group. But one issue that has not been discussed is how the Hispanic population growth can help Hispanic philanthropy.

The Hispanic community has long and deep roots in volunteerism. In the past, with fewer financial resources, Hispanics always could be counted on to support their family, church and community with gifts of time. My parents, both with full-time jobs and eight children, always had time to volunteer at church and school. Generosity is part of the Hispanic culture. The simple expression "mi casa es su casa" (my house is your house) sums up our strong commitment to giving.

However, America's economic expansion, combined with the Hispanic community's tradition of volunteerism, is creating more opportunities for Hispanic philanthropy. Hispanic purchasing power will exceed \$ 452 billion in 2001, a 118 percent increase since 1990, according to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia. Likewise, Hispanic owned businesses continue to grow at the highest level ever. The U.S. Census Bureau has counted nearly 1.2 million Hispanic owned firms.

The Hispanic community is beginning to have the financial resources to make significant monetary contributions in addition to the traditional gifts of time. Now is the moment to plan for increased charitable donations from the Hispanic community.

An instructive report by the Council on Foundations titled "Cultures of Caring: Philanthropy in Diverse American Communities" discusses expanding philanthropic giving in the growing Hispanic community. Among the report's findings:

- The number of Hispanics achieving professional career status is increasing and so is the number of Hispanics who are participating in organized philanthropy. But the number of Hispanics engaged in organized philanthropy is small when compared with the potential pool of such donors.
- Hispanics report a dearth of effective, targeted outreach efforts by nonprofit organizations in general, and by more established mainstream institutions especially, to solicit their involvement and financial support.

- Like mainstream philanthropists, Hispanic donors seem to respond most favorably to appeals from leaders and peers in their community or profession for support of organizations or causes with which they have personal experience - either as a beneficiary or a volunteer.

One challenge is to educate development officers and fund-raising professionals on how best to “make the ask” in the Hispanic community. As more Hispanics join America’s middle class, mainstream institutions must make an effort to understand Hispanic giving habits, including our culture, interests and needs.

The other challenge is how to best educate the Hispanic community on the available philanthropic tools and giving opportunities. Many Hispanics are not familiar with corporate matching, planned giving, endowments and capital campaigns.

Last year, some of my siblings and I decided to establish a college scholarship at our alma mater in our parents’ honor. Our group - which included two lawyers, an engineer and a MBA – didn’t know where to begin. We had no family experience to draw upon, and we knew no charitable financial adviser. Instead, on our own, we conducted considerable research and reviewed several options. In the end, we endowed the scholarship, using a corporate match, to benefit Hispanic students.

My personal experiences have taught me that the best way to encourage giving from Hispanics is to get us involved as volunteers or board members in nonprofit organizations with missions that we support. That will lead us to contribute not only our time, but also our money. These volunteers, as Hispanic community members, can identify prospects and help “make the ask”. Hispanic donors are usually most responsive when approached by respected and trusted Hispanic leaders.

The Hispanic community is hard working and creative, with a sincere sense of responsibility to help others. With increasing population, growing financial resources, and raised awareness, the opportunity exists to nurture and promote a new philanthropy in the Hispanic community that leverages our new wealth for the benefit of generations to come.

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