

The City of Phoenix Latino Institute: Bridging the Gap between Community Needs and Services

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: When providing services to individuals of Latin American descent living in the U.S., municipal park and recreation agencies are faced with three overarching issues: the population continues to grow at a dramatic rate, has differing values and cultures based on their heritage and levels of acculturation, and has different life contexts that influence their needs. Taken together, these various issues suggest a more comprehensive programmatic effort is needed to effectively service this population. Within the City of Phoenix, the Latino Institute was introduced in 2000 in the Parks and Recreation Department as a freestanding program to help address the aforementioned issues and to bridge the gap between the City and the Latino community. Today, the Latino Institute produces numerous programs for the community and serves as an outreach specialist that provides special events, networking, and cultural competency expertise to the City and agencies which aim to provide services to the Latino community. Over the past 13 years, the Latino Institute has gained a number of insights that have helped their program to succeed where others have not. First, the importance of partnerships was stressed. Partners help not only through their financial resources, but also through the volunteers they may provide and the added social network value they produce. During the most difficult financial times at the City of Phoenix, these partners provided the support the Latino Institute needed to survive the most recent economic recession. Second, understanding the community with all its diversity was critical. This helped to ensure that different needs were represented in the programs the Latino Institute implemented. Third, continuously reaching out to the Latino community, maintaining a high level of service, and being reliable and transparent, helped the Latino Institute to maintain a high level of trust in the eyes of both the community and the City. This high level of trust has also played an important role in maintaining a positive level of political support. Lastly, given the small number of staff the Latino Institute maintains and the many initiatives it pursues, having a strategic plan that is monitored by an engaged executive board has helped to focus Latino Institute efforts and maximize its limited resources.

KEYWORDS: municipal recreation, program, management, Latino, case study

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Municipal parks and recreation services are beneficial to the quality of life of community members. Historically, this has come through their effects on community health, safety, education, economic impact, and social support (Russell, 2013; Sherer, 2006). For those who have traditionally had greater needs, such as ethnic minorities, park and recreation services are even more important (Rodríguez, Larsen, Látková, & Mertel, 2012). However, the provision of services to ethnic minorities has commonly been fraught with challenges. Academic scholars suggest these challenges stem from actual or perceived sense of discrimination, historical inequalities in resource provisions, cultural differences, and differing levels of assimilation (Floyd & Nicholas, 2008). Adding to these challenges, public park and recreation agencies are facing difficult financial constraints that limit their capacity to cater to different constituencies that have differing expectations of services (Fulton, 2012). Due to these challenges, individuals from various ethnic minority groups might not only be underserved, but might be at risk of receiving inadequate or ineffective park and recreation services when services are provided to them. Among ethnic minority groups, it is becoming increasingly important for park and recreation professionals to understand how to best provide services to individuals of Latin American descent residing in the U.S. This is due to three primary issues or trends.

First, the population of individuals who have descended from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other select countries within Latin America (including the Caribbean) living in the United States continues to grow at a markedly rapid pace, making recreation service provision more commonplace to these individuals. Between 2000 and 2010, the total U.S. population grew by 27 million residents (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Of these, 15 million or 56% were of Latin American descent (Ennis et al., 2011). As of the 2010 U.S. Census, there were over 50 million individuals who self-identified as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish living in the U.S., accounting for 16% of the total population in the U.S. (Ennis et al., 2011). While the vast majority of this population resides in states that border Mexico, an increasing number of individuals of Latin American descent currently reside in each state (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011a).

Second, individuals of Latin American descent, while quite heterogeneous, do share some values and cultural preferences. However, these shared constructs are primarily contingent on their national heritage and level of acculturation (Rodríguez, in press). For instance, a person of Latin American descent who self-identifies as American, as does 21% of this population, may have values and cultural preferences more in line with the dominant culture than the 51% who self-identify with their family's country of origin or the 24% who self-identify as Hispanic/Latino (4% indicated it depended on the situation, didn't know, or refused to answer the question) (Taylor, Lopez, Martínez, & Velasco, 2012). From a heritage perspective, most (65%) individuals of Latin American descent living in the U.S. are of Mexican descent (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011b). However, even among this population, some have lived in the U.S. for many generations, while some are recent immigrants, suggesting varying levels of acculturation among this subpopulation. Research suggests the immigration status of a person of Mexican descent (and other cultural backgrounds) has an impact on leisure behavior (Stodolska & Yi, 2003).

Lastly, individuals of Latin American descent differ in the life contexts that contribute to their quality of life. For instance, individuals of Columbian descent who predominantly reside in Florida and New York have a lower rate of poverty compared to the national poverty rate (13% compared to 15%, respectively) and have a higher proportion of individuals with

a bachelor's degree or higher than found on average across the U.S. (32% compared to 28%, respectively) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a, 2012b). Conversely, individuals of Mexican descent who predominantly live throughout the southwest U.S. have a 27% poverty rate and only 9% have a bachelor's degree or higher (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011b). While it is clear the life circumstances of those who are of Mexican descent differ from those of Columbian descent living in the U.S., overall, those of Latin American descent lag behind their Euro-American counterparts in numerous quality-of-life indicators (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a).

As a whole, individuals of Latin American descent have been found to recreate in a family-focused manner (Stodolska, Shinew, & Li, 2010), which includes recreating in outdoor areas with amenities, such as picnic tables and access to water, which accommodate larger groups (Chavez & Olson, 2009). Additionally, given their work schedules, they tend to primarily be day-use visitors to outdoor recreation facilities (Chavez, 2005). Compared to their White counterparts, individuals of Latin American descent place greater emphasis on amenities when visiting a recreation facility and are more likely to be discouraged from visiting a recreation area due to perceived levels of discrimination (Chavez, 2005).

However, researchers caution against homogenizing this population and its recreation preferences. For instance, Chavez (2005) noted that there is variability in preferences among those of Mexican descent and individuals from Central or South America living in the U.S. Research by Cordell, Green, and Betz (2004) found differences in outdoor activity preferences by individuals of Mexican descent and those identified as Hispanic not of Mexican origin. Those identified as Hispanic not of Mexican origin were more likely to view/photograph natural scenery, visit nature centers, do boat tours or excursions, and visit prehistoric/archeological sites. However, those of Mexican descent were more likely to go caving than their Hispanic not of Mexican origin counterparts.

Collectively, these findings suggest a "one-size-fits-all" approach to leisure service provision is unlikely to adequately meet the needs of this diverse population. The three issues point to the need for innovative and robust services, which account for the population growth and diverse nature of individuals of Latin American descent. In reviewing the literature, there is a general lack of practically oriented research to guide park and recreation managers as they aim to address these various issues at the municipal level. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to help fill this gap by providing a case study of the Latino Institute, a successful program, which has been implemented in the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department for over 13 years. The purpose of the case study is to provide readers with an understanding of the Latino Institute from an organizational perspective and to identify some of the key lessons learned which may be helpful to municipal agencies who wish to implement their own Latino Institute or similar organization.

Latino Institute

Between 1980 and 2000, the City of Phoenix incurred a 261% population increase of individuals of Latin American descent, one of the largest increases throughout the country (Suro, 2000). Government officials recognized the importance of this demographic increase and aimed to reach out to this population to address their needs. In Arizona, some of the challenges facing individuals of Latin American descent include low levels of education, low earned income, and poverty [which is also correlated with *food insecurity* or the lack of access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food (World Health Organization, 2013)], feelings of discrimination largely due to immigration policies, and a lack of understanding of government and their services, in particular among the growing immigrant population (Hart & Hager, 2012; Toon, 2010).

The City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department was identified as the most effective means to deliver the Latino Institute program due to its historically collaborative engagement with community members. According to D. Ortega-Nowakowski, the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Board Chair, "park and recreation programmers work with individuals in the community day in and day out, who else knows them best?" (personal

communication, February 26, 2013). Additionally, park and recreation services within the City of Phoenix, as with many communities throughout the country, have been identified as safe places and spaces to socialize, learn, and enhance one's overall quality of life. It was within this context that the Latino Institute was developed in 2000. Thus, the primary aim of the Latino Institute was to serve as a bridge between the City of Phoenix and the Latino community.

Today, the Latino Institute continues to be a program of the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department, which hosts events, workshops, and other programs "to enhance the quality of life for all communities through a collective effort that recognizes the richness of the Latino culture, its contributions to society, and its challenges for the future" (City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department, 2012). The Latino Institute has worked toward this mission by providing programs and special events that have empowered the community by helping them understand the roles of government and current laws. It has also produced workshops to educate City employees regarding cultural competencies when working with individuals of Latin American descent. Additionally, it has effectively connected agencies who wish to provide salutary services, such as health and education services, to the Latino community in a manner the respective agencies had not been able to. The following sections will provide an overview of the Latino Institute program relative to four main components: 1) administration, staffing and volunteers, 2) programs, 3) funding, and 4) outreach.

Administration, Staffing, and Volunteers

The Latino Institute is overseen by an executive board composed of two co-chairs who manage the day-to-day operations of the Latino Institute and an additional six to eight other board members. The day-to-day operations include managing the events, workshops, and other programs along with their budgets and other administrative duties. The two co-chairs are City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department employees with special events and programming backgrounds who are also of Mexican descent. The other board members are representatives from various departments in the City of Phoenix, such as the City Manager's Office, the Police Department, the Law Department, and the Parks and Recreation Department. The primary role of the board is to provide guidance to the Latino Institute, such as through their efforts in the development of a strategic plan and in their role of a sounding board to the co-chairs. It should be noted that all of the board members provide their services on a volunteer basis.

The City of Phoenix, like other municipalities, is divided into numerous departments with unique duties, such as police, public works, and human services (City of Phoenix, 2012). The Parks and Recreation Department is further broken down into various divisions. Communicating to each of these Park and Recreation Department divisions and City departments is done through liaisons. Division and departmental liaisons meet with representatives of the Latino Institute on a monthly basis. This facilitates communication of efforts by the Latino Institute to other employees within the municipality.

In addition to the board members and liaisons, the Latino Institute has volunteers from various partnerships that help them in the implementation of programs. The Latino Institute co-chairs or a designated volunteer manager oversees volunteers. In prior events, this designated volunteer manager has been an employee of the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department who has extensive experience managing large groups of volunteers for day events. Events provided by the Latino Institute commonly attract thousands of community members. Partners, such as the Bank of America, APS (an electricity company), and other major companies in the local community provide large numbers of volunteers for Latino Institute events. For example, approximately 150 volunteers (75 FTEs) assist annually at the El Día de los Niños Children's Festival hosted by the Latino Institute.

Programs

One of the primary ways in which the Latino Institute is able to serve as a bridge between City employees, community agencies, and the Latino community is through the

provision of programs. This article will focus on two programs, the Latino Institute Annual Conference, and the Back to School and Health Fair. Additional programs not included in this paper, but which have been provided by the Latino Institute include the El Día de los Niños Children's Festival, neighborhood community fairs, teen conferences that deal with numerous teen issues such as leadership and dating violence, and an annual awards luncheon to recognize sponsors, volunteers, and outstanding citizens of the community. In all programs, the Latino Institute uses its expertise in special events along with its community networks to effectively carry out its programs.

Latino Institute Annual Conference. From 2001 and 2006, the Latino Institute hosted an annual conference. The original purpose of the conference was to educate City of Phoenix employees on current issues facing the Latino community and cultural competencies relevant to the population. However, the conference developed into an outlet that also promoted youth education and a forum to discuss community issues in response to community requests. While the program was deemed to be successful in its ability to provide a forum for healthy discourse and information sharing, by 2004, Latino Institute leaders were questioning its long-term effectiveness and were concerned with the cost of the annual conferences for the impact that it was having. An alternative, to provide programs more directly to the Latino community, was proposed by the Latino Institute executive board.

The Back to School and Health Fair. In 2005, the pilot Back to School and Health Fair was launched. During the pilot year, the program focused primarily on being a back to school event for youth and their families, provide children with backpacks and other school supplies, and offer educational sessions to help parents understand the school systems in the U.S. and how to better navigate them.

The event has evolved, and there are two main components to it. The first focuses on the children and their needs to begin school successfully. Children are given supplies for school, including a backpack, haircut, health checks, and immunizations free of charge. Health officials who partner with the Latino Institute to provide these services provide the immunizations. The other component of the event is to educate and empower families through educational workshops and other informational sessions. Additionally, families receive free mammograms and prostate exams, health checks, HIV and pregnancy testing, and more. City and area agencies bring valuable resources to families by providing them information on lifestyle, nutrition, health, mental health, finance, and consumer updates on new laws or consumer products. The families may also engage in plenary presentations that feature specialists in their fields. These "talk show" formats provide a safe setting for residents to meet other residents, present ideas and receive reactions to these ideas, or ask questions with the panelists and leave with a better understanding of how their local community works and where they can get answers surrounding future concerns.

Many of the participants in the event are recent immigrants of Mexican descent who are learning to adapt to the U.S. and its many systems. For example, in some instances, recent immigrants were simply playing on soccer fields without reserving them and were not following reservation requirements or littering policies. The Back to School and Health Fair provided educational classes to teach parents about park and recreation systems and how to engage with their community resources in a more sustainable manner. In addition to park and recreation resources, classes are also provided to help community members better understand how to work with City government and any recent legislation that might impact them. Aside from immigration legislation, such as SB1070, which might affect a proportion of individuals of Latin American descent living in Arizona, other laws, such as recent State changes in the child safety seat laws, affect all families with young children. The Back to School and Health Fair addresses the local school systems, their registration formats and deadlines, policies on codes of conduct, parents organizations, after-school possibilities, public and private school differences, bullying in schools, the mandates on immunizations, the vital records of the student, how to become involved in the school, and supporting the student and understanding of the parent role as their child attends school.

Funding

While funding for the Latino Institute differs each year, approximately 80% of the budget is funded through sponsorships and programming fees, such as vendor fees at special events. The remaining 20% of the budget is funded through the City of Phoenix. Most of the budget from the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department is provided in-kind through the provision of office space and resources, a web presence, access to email, and minimal staff support. Additionally, the City of Phoenix Public Information Office provides marketing assistance to the Latino Institute.

Due to the success of its special events, the Latino Institute has been successful at receiving numerous sponsorships. Major sponsors are Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona, Arizona Public Services, and Bank of America. The Institute also received a number of supporting sponsors including AAA and Watermills Express. Their media sponsors include Phoenix 11, PBS, Telemundo TV, Univision Radios, Latino Vibe/104.3, Teleritmo Magazine, LaVoz and have included KTAR/12 News, KPHO and other local broadcasting stations.

Outreach

In addition to providing programs, the Latino Institute provides assistance to community agencies attempting to reach out to the Latino community. While the Latino Institute did not directly provide the following three outreach programs, it was asked to assist in the partnering agency's program due to its special events expertise and relationship with the Latino community.

PBS Ready to Learn. PBS has been a sponsor to the Latino Institute for nine years. As their partnership grew, it was determined that PBS programming, such as digital media and teacher resources, would be a natural educational outreach to the community. The Ready to Learn program focuses on increasing literacy and math achievement among high-risk pre-school and elementary school-aged children through integrated transmedia content. This is accomplished through the playing of PBS interactive games designed to teach math and literacy skills. The Latino Institute and PBS partnered with the City of Phoenix PAC program (citywide afterschool program) to feature digital media in an afterschool setting. Students aged 5 to 8 are brought into a computer lab or shared space with a large video screen to play the various PBS interactive games. Students engage with games, computers, mobile phones, and other types of electronic devices, creating a learning context that benefits the student, school, parent, PBS, and Latino Institute during the 8-week program.

Quinceañera. The *quinceañera* is a celebration of a young woman turning 15 years old. Depending on the Latin American country, the name may differ, but the significance of the event remains relatively consistent. This celebration is considered a rite of passage for young women of Latin American descent and signifies a transition from childhood to womanhood. The event itself holds significant cultural value, and financial costs can be similar to those often found for a wedding. Given the high costs to produce the event (e.g., costs associated with dresses, food, venue, music, invitations, and dance choreography), community members developed an innovative program where a community-wide approach to the *quinceañera* is taken. Instead of doing a *quinceañera* for one young woman, multiple young women have it at the same time. However, such an event is quite large and technical. In this case, community members reached out to the Latino Institute for advice on potential sponsors and community partners along with how to best reach out to the Latino community to let them know of this opportunity. In addition, the Latino Institute was asked for advice on marketing and other technical questions such those related to venues, equipment, and structure of the event.

Replicating the Latino Institute. The success of the Latino Institute has spurred other communities to implement their own "Latino Institutes." In order to assist these communities, the City of Phoenix Latino Institute provided technical advice on programming, sponsorship, funding, and other technical issues necessary to implement Latino Institute programs. Within Arizona, both the City of Tolleson and City of Glendale initiated Latino Institute program efforts. However, each implemented its own Latino Institute in a unique

way. In the City of Glendale, its Latino Institute had a youth focus and was primarily focused on creating a teen forum where youth could learn about their community and discuss community issues that were relevant to them. In the City of Tolleson, its Parks and Recreation Department provides an annual community health fair based on Latino Institute principles. According to J. F. Rodriguez, a City of Tolleson Council member, "...the fair provides much needed health-related services for children and families along with hosting a *plática* (conversation) series in which municipal representatives, such as the mayor or police chief, discuss current City issues..." (personal communication, Feb., 23, 2013). Both the *plática* and health services stemmed from the City of Phoenix Latino Institute Back to School and Health Fair. The next section of this article will focus on lessons learned from these initiatives and other Latino Institute experiences.

Lessons Learned

Over the past 13 years, a number of important lessons have been learned that have helped to sustain the Latino Institute, in particular during challenging economic times, and helped it to work toward its mission of enhancing the quality of life of community residents. Among these key lessons learned is the importance of partnerships, understanding the community, having the trust of the community and the City of Phoenix, political support, and strategic planning.

Partnerships

With a six- to eight-member executive board, there are not enough individuals to implement all that the Latino Institute does by simply relying upon these board members alone. As such, partnerships are paramount. However, when working with other agencies to expand its services, the Latino Institute carefully selects which agencies it wishes to work with due to its limited resources. Managing collaborations to ensure quality services takes time and resources, both of which the Latino Institute have a limited amount. Ultimately, when selecting an agency to work with, the Latino Institute focuses on those agencies that help it to best meet its mission, goals, and objectives outlined by the executive board.

When selecting agencies to partner with, the Latino Institute has found that it is often more efficient to work with agencies that wish to expand on current Latino Institute programs. For instance, in the Back to School and Health Fair, the Latino Institute partners with healthcare providers to provide the necessary medical exams and immunizations. Likewise, in El Día de los Niños, the Latino Institute partners with other City departments, local nonprofits, and businesses to provide hands-on and educational activities that focus on science, literacy, cultural awareness, and active lifestyles. In both of these major events, the Latino Institute develops the framework for the events and brings in partners to help it meet its event goals and objectives. Being strategic about the partners whom the Latino Institute works with has helped it to maintain high quality programming with its limited resources.

Understanding the Community

Recreation programs that wish to successfully meet the needs of individuals of Latin American descent living in the U.S. must first understand what these needs are. While there are national issues relative to this population such as those related to education, health, employment, and immigration, these and other issues differ from community to community. Meaningfully engaging with the community is critical if an agency wishes to truly understand the needs of its members.

In addition to the plenary sessions at the Back to School and Health Fair, residents engage in parks and recreation activities on a continuous basis. This continuous engagement leads to constant feedback, which is used as a form of evaluation for programs. With this constant feedback, the Latino Institute is able to develop programs that are not only fun and energetic, but also programs that meet the needs of the community. Furthermore, community understanding was facilitated as Latino Institute board members had a

similar cultural background as those individuals whom they were serving and had years of experience providing direct services to individuals of Latin American descent in the community.

The experiences from the Latino Institute suggests that translation of material into both English and Spanish helps to reach a larger number of individuals, but translation of material should not be viewed as the “fix” to making a program accessible to individuals of Latin American descent. If the content of the program is not salient to the population it is meant to reach, an agency can translate program material into any language, and it will not be effective (Chavez, 2008).

Trust

As discussed earlier, the primary aim of the Latino Institute is to serve as a bridge between the City of Phoenix and the Latino community. A key component to this is trust. The Latino Institute developed a relationship of trust with the community by listening to them, implementing programs that reflected their needs, and following through on programmatic commitments.

The continued provision of quality programs and services that meet the diverse needs of the Latino community has helped build trust with not only community residents, but also the municipality and community agencies as a whole. Over the past 13 years, the City of Phoenix has gone through many fiscal challenges, but the community’s support of the Latino Institute has continued. This is not only due to the niche addressed by the Latino Institute, but also the quality of their programs and the transparency of the Latino Institute.

Political Support

Beyond partnerships, the Latino Institute has worked hard to maintain positive support from both City of Phoenix policy makers and administrative units, such as the Parks and Recreation Board. According to the Parks and Recreation Board Chair, “... the Latino Institute fills in a much needed service...when services are cut across the City, those in the Latino community, who often have less, are greatly affected” (D. Ortega-Nowakowski, personal communication, February 26, 2013). This relationship has been facilitated through continuous communication, transparency, inclusion of board members from various City departments, and the ability of the Latino Institute to maintain a high level of quality for their programs and services.

An additional key component in receiving political support is the manner in which the program is presented and managed. According to A. Santana, former co-chair of the Latino Institute, “the Latino Institute is not just for Latinos, but is an opportunity to educate others about Latinos” (personal communication, February 25, 2013). Santana further stated that the Latino Institute provides an avenue for many organizations, both within and outside of the City of Phoenix, to better understand the issues facing this growing population. These issues may include parks and recreation services, transportation, law enforcement, health, finances, education, and an array of other issues.

In the City of Tolleson, the annual health fair continues to receive administrative and political support. However, in the City of Glendale, their Latino Institute did not receive political support beyond the first year and ultimately has not been held since. According to R. Daniels, one of the founders of the City of Phoenix Latino Institute and a retired youth development specialist of the City of Glendale Parks and Recreation Department who also directed the event, “after the first year, the city manager requested we do the activity outside of the City. Without the support of the City, it died out” (personal communication, February 23, 2013).

Strategic Planning

To better serve the community and stay focused on its mission and goals, the Latino Institute executive committee developed a strategic plan. The strategic plan represents the Board’s efforts to further broaden the Latino Institute’s horizon and truly be a unified voice for the Latino community. The Latino Institute understands the ever changing needs of the

Latino community and the continued need to provide services that will enhance the quality of life for the Latino community. Resource development and partnerships are important to the growth and expansion of the program as well as future planning. The plan focuses on programs, partnerships, outreach, and civic engagement. This plan is not just a framework in itself, but rather reflects a way of thinking and an ongoing process; it is a dynamic and vigorous plan that the Latino Institute revisits annually. It is a plan that will continue to build a program that is visionary and relevant to the rapidly changing Latino community.

Program Critique: A Closer Look

The Latino Institute was developed at a time when there was pressure to address the growing need of service provision to the Latino community. This pressure to provide more diverse services was noted and addressed through a freestanding program in the Latino Institute. Freestanding programs, such as Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunities, are outcomes of formalized diversity initiatives, which are designed to address diversity issues. Unlike systemic approaches, freestanding programs have yet to be fully integrated into core agency activities (Dass & Parker, 1999). While systemic approaches represent the highest level of integration, freestanding programs might also be effective when implemented in a more focused manner.

Within the Latino Institute, many of their efforts have been focused through two factors. First, the Latino Institute is guided by a strategic plan that was developed by representatives of various departments throughout the City of Phoenix. Second, the Latino Institute receives constant feedback from the executive board and divisions in the Parks and Recreation department, along with a broader base of representatives from the other City departments through their liaisons.

In spite of the approach an agency takes, of more importance when addressing diversity issues is the diversity perspective an agency holds. For instance, agencies that view diversity as a threat often respond to diversity issues in a reactive manner and work to maintain the status quo either through episodic, freestanding, or systemic approaches (Dass & Parker, 1999). The diversity perspective of the City of Phoenix is more in line with a discrimination and fairness perspective. This perspective commonly leads to actions that attempt to create equal opportunities for members of diverse groups (Dass & Parker, 1999). In the case of the Latino Institute, programs are developed with the focus of empowering community members such as through educational workshops.

Conclusion

Municipal parks and recreation departments are under increasing pressure to meet the growing needs of the Latino community. Meeting this demand is hindered by not only the current fiscal challenges many municipalities are facing but by the complex nature of the Latino community itself. In this article, the Latino Institute was introduced as a freestanding program to help address many of these issues and to bridge the gap between the City of Phoenix and the Latino community. Today, the Latino Institute produces numerous programs for the community and serves as an outreach specialist that provides special events, networking, and cultural competency expertise to the City and agencies that aim to provide services to the Latino community. Through its programs, the Latino Institute has been a trusted partner the Latino community has been able to rely upon. Over the past 13 years, the Latino Institute has gained a number of insights that have helped its program to succeed where others have not. Among these insights, the importance of leadership and strategic planning, partnerships, trust, political support, and understanding the community were noted. During the most difficult financial times at the City of Phoenix, these insights played a pivotal role in sustaining the Latino Institute program.

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