

**LATINO CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING:
Building Bridges with our Host Community**

This past year, 578 individuals from 31 organizations increased their understanding of the local Hispanic population through our *Latino Cultural Competency Training program*. Participants in our workshops came from other nonprofit organizations, government agencies, universities and private corporations. "This was the best training I have ever attended at CNM [Center for Nonprofit Management]," one participant said. What else can we say?

Please give us a call to learn more about how our training can help your organization improve interactions with Latinos...in the workplace, in the marketplace, in your neighborhood.

THE JOB CONNECTION: Connecting the Latino Workforce with Potential Employers

We recently launched *The Job Connection/ Conexión al Trabajo*, a web-based job posting board to help Latino job seekers directly connect with potential employers.

Corporations, governmental and non-profit organizations can post their job openings in our website's job board for free.

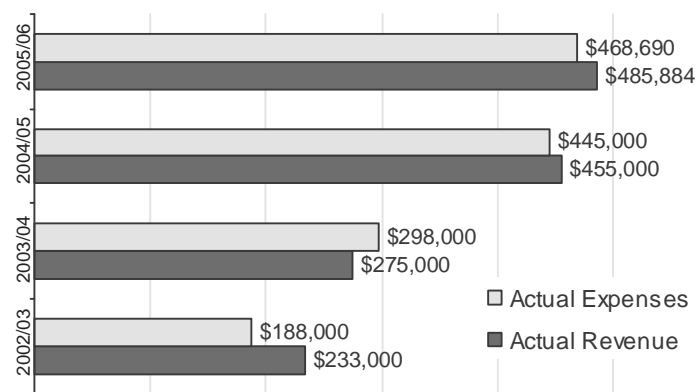
The process is simple. Please contact María Clara Mejía for instructions: (615) 320-5152 or at mariaclara@conamericas.com.

Job seekers can directly go to Conexión Américas' website, www.conexionamericas.org, and click on 'The Job Connection'. They can view all jobs posted as well as employer contact information and instructions to apply, all free of cost.

The Job Connection website is possible thanks to our board president, José Mena, and his generous and talented team at EDS. Muchas gracias, EDS!

LAST BUT NOT LEAST: Our Finances

We ended the fiscal year with \$485,884 in revenue. Our total expenses amounted to \$468,690, for an operating surplus of \$17,194. The chart below provides a historical perspective of our finances since Conexión Américas was founded in 2002:



For more detailed financial information, please see Conexión Américas' profile at GivingMatters.com.



Through their financial support of at least \$1,000, the following organizations made possible the results shared in this report:

- The Cal Turner Family Foundation
- Community Shares
- The HCA Foundation
- Internal Revenue Service/Taxpayer Education
- United Way of Metropolitan Nashville
- The Community Foundation
- The Memorial Foundation
- Ajax Turner Co/ Budweiser
- Amsouth Bank
- Bank of America
- Bellsouth
- Bridgestone Firestone
- Cracker Barrel
- Dex Imaging & Mailing
- Dollar General
- EDS
- Fifth Third Bank
- Ford Motor Company Fund
- Kroger
- Media Mail
- News Channel 5
- PrimeTrust Bank
- Southeast Financial Federal Credit Union
- Suntrust Bank
- TN Dept. of Economic Development

The following organizations are our dear partners. We couldn't do it without them:

- Belmont University
- Capital Bank & Trust
- Catholic Charities – Hispanic Services
- Earnhardt Pirkle
- Federal Home Loan Bank Cincinnati
- The Housing Fund
- Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee
- Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
- Nashville Wealth Building Alliance
- Southeast Financial Federal Credit Union
- SunTrust Bank, Nashville
- Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition
- Vanderbilt University

2,407 Latino families helped

2,584 calls to Spanish Help Line

1,084 face-to-face appointments

96 English/Spanish mentors

12 grassroots leaders

84 new homeowners

204 tax returns

35 entrepreneurs trained

578 Tennesseans trained

1 national award

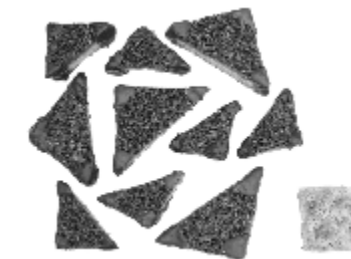
Since 2002 Conexión Américas has been striving to address some of the most pressing challenges created by recent demographic changes in Tennessee as an increasing number of Latino families come to this region searching for a better quality of life. In this report, we share key results achieved during our recently completed fiscal year. It was the most challenging year yet, especially the past few months.

The debate over what to do with the immigration system in this country has elicited an important and long overdue discussion; but unfortunately more often it has served to dehumanize immigrants, in general, and Latinos, in particular. The hostility is most evident in radio and TV shows and in messages from politicians of all levels and from all parties. But the most insidious ramifications strike home: right here workers are living in fear with no certainty about their future, families are divided across two countries with no hope for reuniting in a reasonable timeline, and whole communities are retreating to further isolation.

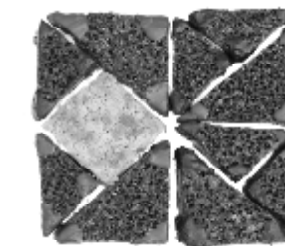
At Conexión Américas, every day we see the effects of our outdated immigration laws. And so as we continue to assist Latino families in their quest for a better quality of life, we will also continue advocating for immigration policies that truly respond to the social and economic realities of our times. We don't know where things are going. Yet we are grabbing on to hope for positive changes as one would hope for rain after a long drought.

Our hope for the future is nurtured in the lessons of this nation's past. It will take a while, but Americans –and our government's policies-- will embrace Latinos as an essential part of the nation's social fabric, as it has been the case with immigrant groups before us. After all, Latinos come to Tennessee for the same reasons white poor Tennesseans from the Appalachian region migrated to Detroit and other northern cities during the Great Depression – to escape poverty, earn a living and send money to feed their families back home.

As we continue promoting the social, economic and civic integration of Latino families into the local community, we are glad to know we have you by our side. We sincerely thank you for your support this past year. We couldn't do it without your friendship and support. Gracias!



conexión
américas
2005 • 2006



Year in Review

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The *integration* of immigrant families into their new community is a multi-dimensional process. Therefore, we focus on three programmatic areas:

- Social integration
- Economic integration
- Civic integration



Integration engages both newcomers and the host community in reciprocal learning and adaptation. Therefore, we employ a dual strategy:

- We work with and for Latino families
- We provide Cultural Competency Training and assistance to other organizations in our host community



• Latinos in Tennessee realize their aspirations for social and economic advancement; improve the quality of life of their families and communities; and are recognized as contributors to the progress and vitality of their adopted home.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

DEBUNKING MYTH #1: Latinos Do Not Come Here to get on Public Welfare

This past year, demand for our services increased dramatically and pushed the boundaries of our internal capacity. We helped over 2,400 Latino families connect with information and resources to address immediate challenges and with tools and knowledge to move forward through our *Spanish Help Line and Face-to-Face Assistance Program*. Many of these families came to us more than once during the year, representing a total volume of over 2,500 calls to our Spanish Help Line and almost 1,100 face-to-face appointments. The information and assistance requested varied in nature, but the three service categories with the highest rate of recurrence were legal consultations, tax information, and job opportunities.

Statistical analysis of our multiple interactions with these families confirms that Latino immigrants are not here to take advantage of government-sponsored social programs, as fallacious sound-bites often claim. In fact, legal immigrants' access to publicly funded services is most restricted by law and undocumented immigrants are ineligible for most of them in the first place. Latinos come to this country ready to work and provide for themselves and their families. Of course, they face challenges as they make their way in their new community. That's when organizations like Conexión Américas pitch in.

DEBUNKING MYTH #2: Latinos Do Want to Learn English

Through our *Conversemos! (Let's Chat!) Language Exchange Program*, 48 Latino adults improved their conversational English through weekly one-on-one meetings with their mentors --48 native English speakers who in turn practiced and improved their Spanish. The 96 peer learners exchanged more than language skills; they participated in a truly cross cultural and cross socio-economic experience that typically pairs a low- to moderate-income Latino worker with a Vanderbilt University student for one semester.

Participants in our program – like most immigrants in the U.S. -- realize that learning English is the single most important step toward their success in this country. However, they have taught us that being able to do so is often extremely difficult. Many adult Latinos face literacy challenges even in their native language (can you imagine trying to learn another language when you can barely read in your own?). Like many low-wage earners, Latinos often work two jobs to provide for their families and the long hours and frequent shift changes interfere with standard schedules for English classes. That's why our program is flexible by design: peer learners adapt to the language skill level of their partner and arrange their weekly meetings around their work, school and family responsibilities.

CIVIC INTEGRATION

DEBUNKING MYTH #3: Latinos Do Want to Follow the Rules

Among other initiatives, this past year our Hispanic Council, a group of 12 grassroots leaders, completed the development of the curriculum "*Las Reglas del Juego*" (*The Rules of the Game*) and taught two workshop to 44 avid listeners. The curriculum addresses basic laws, norms and customs. Hispanic Council members conducted many interviews to gather experiences from other newcomers guided by one core question: What information or tips do you wish someone would have shared with you when you first came here?

Leaders in our Hispanic Council were inspired to develop this curriculum by the basic yet cumbersome challenges they –and their relatives, friends and co-workers—have faced since they arrived in the Nashville area for just simply not knowing better. Most problems they have encountered are rooted in ignorance or misguidance, not in a deliberate disregard for local laws and customs, as we often hear from media personalities unfamiliar with the realities of the immigration experience.

The truth is most Latinos want nothing more than to play by the rules. That's why they seek information and assistance at Conexión Américas and why our Hispanic Council is committed to spreading the word about "the rules of the game" in this community. For Latino families needing legal counsel with specific matters, our network of volunteer lawyers provides them with quality legal advice through one-on-one sessions. This past year alone, 124 families received legal advice about their particular case from eight pro bono lawyers. Thanks to these committed lawyers, families who could not afford legal consultation fees can rely on qualified professionals instead of resorting to unscrupulous businesses without credentials known for taking advantage of low-income individuals.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

DEBUNKING MYTH #4: Latinos Do Not Send all Their Money Back Home

Determined to achieve the "American dream", 84 Latino families saved money for a down-payment, completed a homebuyer education course and finally purchased a home of their own through our *Puertas Abiertas/Open Doors Homeownership Program* last year. The new home, for each of these families, represents one of the most important accomplishments toward improving their quality of life; but it also represents a key milestone in their unequivocal desire to invest in and be part of their new community.

The discipline in managing finances developed by these low- and moderate-income families as a function of their commitment to send money to relatives back home, has proven to be their greatest asset when buying a house here: Our partner financial institutions, who have extended a combined total of over \$17 million in loans to 158 Latino families since we started this program, report that 100 percent of our borrowers are sending their mortgage payments on time. That's right: zero 'delinquency' payments, no foreclosures; just happy lenders and satisfied new homeowners.

Home equity represents the single largest asset held by most Americans. By helping Latino families access the most traditional route to building wealth in this country, this program represents one of the most successful strategies to empower low- and moderate-income Hispanic families socially and economically. The success of this program was recognized with a national award by NeighborWorks®America, the nation's premier community development umbrella organization. Our program won first place for our innovative partnership with The Housing Fund, Capital Bank and Trust, Southeast Financial Federal Credit Union, SunTrust Bank and the Federal Home Loan Bank of Cincinnati.

DEBUNKING MYTH #5: Latinos Do Not Take Jobs and Opportunity Away from Americans

In addition to homebuying and other domestic consumer spending, Latinos –like earlier immigrant groups-- are investing resources and creating new jobs in local communities through their businesses. To support this entrepreneurial spirit, Conexión Américas offers business training and networking opportunities to small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs in Middle Tennessee. Last year, 35 Latino individuals successfully completed our 18-hour course, *Negocio Próspero (Prosperous Business)*, and increased their knowledge on how to start, manage and grow their family or small enterprise. In addition, 97 Latino individuals participated in *Avance! (Move Forward!)*, a one-day educational, networking and peer-learning conference.

Our experience with Latino entrepreneurs confirms the fact that they are creating jobs for relatives, for other immigrants and for native workers. Yet we often hear immigrants are blamed for taking jobs away from U.S. citizens. Experts help us understand the disconnect: Americans can concretely see the jobs immigrants fill (when driving by a construction site or eating at a restaurant); however, it is harder to notice the jobs immigrants create through productivity, capital formation and demand for goods and services.

DEBUNKING MYTH #6: Latino Immigrants Do Pay Taxes

One of the busiest times of the year for Conexión Américas is 'tax season'. Last year alone, 204 Hispanic families completed and filed their tax returns through our *Tax Payer Outreach and Assistance Program*. We averaged three interactions per family to complete the process, so in the first three months of the year over 600 interactions with Latino families were related to taxpaying. Those numbers do not include the 453 individuals who increased their understanding of the US tax system and of their tax rights and responsibilities through 24 workshops we conducted throughout Middle Tennessee.

Most taxpayers we reached are recent immigrants, documented and otherwise. Contrary to popular belief, undocumented immigrants have long paid income taxes through special identification numbers issued by the Internal Revenue Service for people who are not eligible for Social Security numbers. Annually they are contributing about \$7 billion to the Social Security Administration.

Of course, immigrants contribute to the US and to Tennessee in many ways beyond the size of their tax payments and the amount they pump into our economy. The cultural enrichment and the vitality they bring to local communities are immeasurable in fiscal terms.