

**NCLR Roundtable on Latinos and Job Creation
September 25, 2012**

**Orlando City Hall
Orlando, Florida**

*Convened by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
Office of Research, Advocacy, and Legislation*

Moderator:

Rafael Collazo, Director of Political Campaigns, NCLR

Participants:

- Alicia Criado, Policy Associate, NCLR
- Catherine Singley, Senior Policy Analyst, NCLR
- Yanidsi Velez, Central Florida Field Coordinator, NCLR
- Eddy Dominguez, Vice President of Business Development, RESOURCE Employment Solutions, and Board Chair, Latino Leadership, Inc.
- Liz Gutierrez, Director of Planning and Programs, Hispanic Services Council
- Valerie Lamm, Manager, Recruitment Team, Florida Hospital
- Luis Martinez, Multicultural Affairs Director, Office of the Mayor, City of Orlando
- Josephine Mercado, Executive Director, Hispanic Health Initiative
- Commissioner Tony Ortiz, Orlando City Council (District 2)
- Lisa Pietri, President, U.S. South Region, National Hispanic Corporate Achievers
- Maria Pinzon, Executive Director, Hispanic Services Council
- State Representative Darren Soto (FL-49)
- Rosalina Stober, Vice President, Hispanic Business Initiative Fund of Florida
- Mayra Uribe, Treasurer, Central Florida Labor Council for Latin American Advancement

Purpose of Roundtable

Demographic changes in the United States make one thing clear: the success of the American economy is inextricably linked to the success of Latino workers. The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that by 2018, Latinos will represent 18% of America's workforce. By 2050, one in three workers will be Latino.

According to new research published by NCLR on October 22, 2012, [*Now Hiring? Latinos and the Job Creation Policies in the South Atlantic*](#), although Latinos are the fastest-growing segment of the workforce, they are often unable to access jobs in the fastest-growing industries. States that are experiencing unprecedented growth in their Latino populations, such as North Carolina and Georgia, have made policy choices without a clear understanding of the Latino labor force, to the detriment of workers and businesses alike.



This missed opportunity reflects the need to engage leaders from a cross-section of the local government, business, and nonprofit sectors in an honest conversation about how to ensure that job creation policies maximize opportunities for Latino workers. The roundtable conversation convened by NCLR in Orlando on September 25, 2012 was a first attempt to initiate this dialogue. Florida was strategically selected given the state's mix of established and newly arriving Latino populations, as well as NCLR's institutional presence in the state.

Alicia Criado anchored the roundtable discussion by sharing the following topline findings from the *Now Hiring?* report:

“Instead of us separating ourselves, instead of us pointing the finger, we need to sit at the table, doing this exact thing that we're doing here, sit down and inform others, because there's much to be offered.”

—Commissioner Tony Ortiz,
City of Orlando

- Limited educational attainment and English proficiency disadvantage many Latino workers.
- Business recruitment thrives as job training languishes.
- Businesses react by recruiting workers from out of state.
- Unfilled openings in bilingual jobs demonstrate policy lag.
- Budding Hispanic enterprises are on unsure footing.
- Anti-immigrant laws and rhetoric hurt workers and businesses.
- Geographic alignment of jobs and workforce do not guarantee employment.

Participants were asked to react to the report's main findings and discuss three key themes that are particularly relevant to Florida: workforce development, small business development, and transportation.

Overall, roundtable contributors affirmed that the report's findings resonated with their experiences of the Latino workforce they encounter, as service providers, businesses, and government entities, in Florida. They also expressed that the issues covered in *Now Hiring?* are rarely discussed by decision-makers and serve as a long-overdue conversation starter regarding the state of the Hispanic workforce.



Workforce Development

Roundtable participants were asked to discuss the challenges of and opportunities for the state's workforce development programs. Those who responded explained that the current workforce development system is not meeting the needs of all Latino workers and is doing little to help Hispanics employed in low-wage jobs achieve upward mobility. Several service providers noted that Hispanics often feel uncomfortable walking into a government workforce one-stop center. They agreed that there is a need to move services to friendly places in Hispanic communities such as churches and community centers.

Low educational attainment and limited English proficiency affect a disproportionate share of Latino workers, creating a significant disadvantage when they compete for jobs. Roundtable participants acknowledged that state job creation policies have inadequately addressed the limited access to language training in Florida. As a result, many companies have resorted to recruiting workers from outside the state, and sometimes outside the country, to fill bilingual positions. One health care industry representative explained that her company has an international department that recruits people from Latin America in order to meet their needs for high-skilled, bilingual medical professionals. This observation represents a missed opportunity to tap the potential of the local labor pool.

Consensus and Recommendations

Most participants concurred that the workforce development system in Florida has inadequately served the needs of Hispanic workers. Customized solutions to address the unique barriers that the Latino workforce faces should be prioritized. Partnerships with community-based organizations that run job training programs should be established in order to better serve the needs of Latino workers.

“There's brokenness in the system because of, one, the cost, and two, the lack of accessibility. More people are looking for trainings but they simply can't get to them. There is a lack of the use of existing organizations such as ours to be a part of the workforce development system and I don't understand why.

—Maria Pinzon, Executive Director, Hispanic Services Council, Tampa, FL

Small Business Development

The group was asked to discuss the state of Latino entrepreneurs, a fast-growing pool of potential job creators. Key questions focused on the availability of resources and major barriers that Hispanic business owners face. Several members of the roundtable described that Florida is unique in that it has a robust network of services available to Latino business owners. However, participants emphasized the need to educate the Hispanic community about existing resources, particularly in central Florida, an area that is rapidly changing with a new influx of Hispanics. It also appears that beyond the need for technical support, language barriers and access to capital are two other major barriers for Hispanics entrepreneurs in Florida.

Consensus and Recommendations

Efforts should be put into increasing Latinos' awareness of small-business-development resources. Organizations offering small-business-development services for the Hispanic community must ensure adequate and culturally appropriate marketing strategies. Group participants reinforced the need to integrate small business development with workforce development strategies to create a more cohesive strategy that ensures the success of all workers in their efforts to obtain economic security.

Transportation

Participants transitioned to a conversation about transportation and the need to increase workers' ability to access jobs. Although transportation did not surface as a major finding in *Now Hiring?*, roundtable participants noted its significance in Central Florida given the lack of public transportation and the spread of the population. Many noted that inaccessible transportation options have limited Hispanics from both obtaining jobs and easily getting to work. Latinos particularly rely on public transportation options to access essentials such as hospitals and schools and are four times more likely than Whites to rely on public transit for their work commute. Participants recommended not waiting for government entities to implement mass transit solutions to address the transportation challenges among Hispanics.

Consensus and Recommendations

Roundtable participants agreed that there is a need to increase research to better understand the gaps in the current transportation systems. At the same time, some suggested the need for nongovernmental entities to proactively propose solutions that can be quickly initiated to address transportation issues that their employees face. Encouraging carpooling and offering financial benefits are a few examples participants offered as possible actions that could be implemented by employers.

“We agree 100%: there’s lack of transportation that’s provided by government in many of these areas where Latinos need to get employed... We’re advocating simple solutions that can solve the transportation issues right away.”

—Eddy Dominguez, Vice President of Business Development, RESOURCE Employment Solutions, and Board Chair, Latino

Conclusion and Major Takeaways

The roundtable convening accomplished NCLR’s goal of initiating a state-level conversation with a group of leaders who normally don’t meet to confront real challenges for Latino workers and discuss partnerships to strengthen the Latino voice and effect policy change. The active participation from the group highlighted the following points of consensus:

- **Need for education and knowledge of issues.** Throughout the roundtable, emphasis was made on increasing education and awareness of challenges and opportunities among decision-makers and Latino workers.
- **Appetite for coalition-building.** The roundtable culminated in interest in developing partnerships between representatives from government, business, and community groups to develop a regional strategy to engage in state policy issues regarding Latino needs related to the workforce, business development, and transportation.

“I just love the opportunity to work with NCLR’s leadership to look at the potential of developing a regional strategy, and I’m really excited that you did this report because we can use it to develop either initiatives or policy recommendations we could bring to our state office or to our local offices to address particular barriers.”

—Liz Gutierrez, Director of Planning and Programs, Hispanic Services Council

NCLR believes that the roundtable setting—along with follow-up activities—serves as a promising model for how policy and civic engagement teams can amplify our impact at the local level.

