



Latino/a Communities Outreach Strategic Plan

National Park Service-Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

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“The National Park

Service is not just about

national parks, we’re

about your parks.”

AUTHOR BIO

Paola Vazquez is a first-generation student at the University of North Texas in Denton majoring in anthropology and minoring in geography with a certificate in sustainability. She was born in Chihuahua Mexico and raised in New Mexico and Texas. She is a National Park Service and Environment for the Americas intern in the Latino Heritage Internship Program. As a Latinx Outreach Coordinator for the NPS-Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, she hopes to foster more involvement from underserved and underrepresented communities in outdoor recreation and conservation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you to all of the NPS- RTCA staff that volunteered their time to be interviewed.

Thank you to various members and leaders of the Latino and Hispanic community who participated in one-on-one interviews and answered survey questions. Your thoughts and ideas are invaluable in making outdoor recreation and conservation equitable.

INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS-RTCA) is a unique federal program that supports community-led projects by leveraging resources through diverse partnerships. Though NPS-RTCA is not a funding program or a “traditional consultant,” we align the planning, design and technical expertise of NPS staff with the skills and abilities of our project partners. The NPS-RTCA is focused on addressing the need for equitable outdoor recreation and conservation assistance to Latino communities in Texas and Oklahoma.

The NPS-RTCA Texas office hosted Paola Vazquez as an Environment for the America’s intern through the Latino Heritage Internship program. Paola served as the Latino Outreach coordinator in order to establish relationships with and facilitate communication between NPS-RTCA Texas and Latino communities in Texas and Oklahoma.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This document will outline a strategic plan for the NPS-RTCA Texas field office in conducting outreach to Latino communities in Texas and Oklahoma with specific steps and recommendations in order to respectfully engage with and grow relationships within those communities.

Interviews were scheduled with NPS-RTCA staff across the country in order to understand past NPS-RTCA projects with Latino communities and learn from staff what could be implemented in the future. Interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders in the Latino community in Texas and Oklahoma in order to gain a better understanding of the needs of the community and identify potential future projects.

GLOSSARY

Access-the concept or ability to use services such as public goods and services. This is often spoken about when referring to the lack of access or barriers that people face that prohibit them from using certain goods and services.

Barrier-things in place that prevent someone from being able to have equal access to goods or services. Can often be a social barrier like money or lack of transportation but can also include geographic location or a disability.

Chicano/a- an American of Mexican origin or descent. Came about during the 1960's in California during the Chicano Movement in which Mexican-Americans fought for social justice

Community-a unified body of individuals: such as the people with common interests living in a particular area. This can be a cultural interest such as language or social interest such as recreation.

Conservation-preservation or protection of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect

Environmental Justice-the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies

Environmentalism-advocacy of the preservation, restoration, or improvement of the natural environment

Equitable-dealing fairly with all concerned by individuals needs. Not to be confused with equal which means dealing with all concerned equally regardless of an individual's needs.

Ethnicity-a social group that shares a culture or country of origin. Latinos can be racially white but ethnically Hispanic. Often a point of contention because some Latinos do not see themselves as “white” but for government documentation such as the Census, they may be counted as such.

Green space-in planning, a space that is preserved or repurposed to serve as an aesthetic natural area like a garden or recreational area like a park or trail.

Hispanic- refers to a person who is from, or a descendant of someone who is from, a Spanish-speaking country. There is a push from younger generations of Latinos who chose to not identify with this term because of its ties to colonialism.

Latino/a- refers to a person who is from, or a descendant of someone who is from, a country in Latin America. Latino is the masculine form of the word while Latina is the feminine form.

Latinx or Latine-an inclusive and gender-neutral or non-binary form of Latino/a.

Latin-American-someone who is from or lives in Latin America

Mexican-American-refers to a person who is from, or a descendant of someone who is from Mexico. Can be of any generation (first, second, etc.).

Outdoor recreation-Recreational activities undertaken for pleasure that generally involve some level of intentional physical exertion and occur in nature-based environments outdoors

Social justice-justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.

Spanish-the second most widely spoken first language in the world, with more than 400 million speakers. Can also be used to refer to someone who is from Spain/a Spaniard

IDENTITY

Throughout this project, identity has been a large part of the conversation. When this internship began, the project was titled the Latinx Outreach Plan but through talking to RTCA staff and community members, I changed the name to the Latino/a Outreach Plan because not one person that I spoke to throughout the research project self-identified as Latinx. So if outreach is being done in communities, I want them to feel as though they are represented in the plan and not just being spoken about with disconnecting terminology.

The definitions in the previous section outline a few of the different identifiers for people that this outreach plan is targeted towards. Many times, people relate to multiple identities that help them connect either racially or culturally to where they are from or where they live. Some respondents stated that they were Mexican and American and Latino.

So, throughout this report you will see me interchangeably using Latino and Hispanic when it comes to topics where Hispanic is the term used because of census data or other government statistics, even though I am still speaking about the same community.

It is important to not have assumptions about someone's identity. It is always a good idea to ask, appropriately, how someone self-identifies. For example, asking community members how they identify, either racially or ethnically is acceptable under the right circumstances. That can be during an interview or survey response or even in casual conversation. If doing an interview or survey, allowing respondents to tailor the answer to however they see fit, either through allowing multiple responses or open-ended responses. If someone "fits" into certain categories such as Hispanic or racially white but does not identify as such, whatever the reason, do not label them as such. Choose to always honor the person's choice in how they identity and not how society has labeled them.

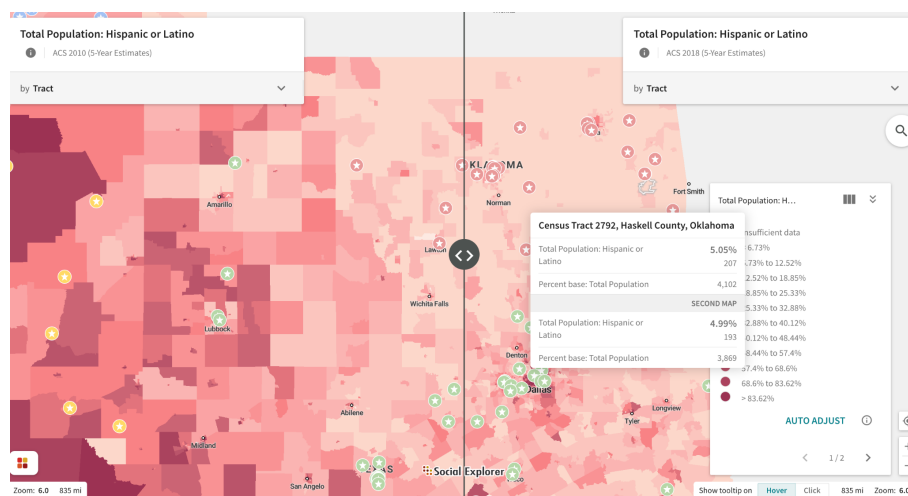
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of the outreach was to collect data on how Latino communities connect with outdoor recreation and conservation and if there were any future projects in Texas or Oklahoma that could benefit from future RTCA assistance. The expectation was to build enough of a relationship with potential partners that they will submit applications for RTCA assistance in the future.

Areas of Interest

I began by trying to identify areas of interest in Texas and Oklahoma using Social Explorer. Through Social Explorer, I used census tract data to identify cities or counties with high percentages of Hispanic populations. Some smaller cities even though they had less overall Hispanics residing in the area than large cities, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino residents was still significant. Cities that had Latino serving colleges, like Lubbock, had higher Hispanic populations than the surrounding areas. These areas are an opportunity to serve Latinos that live further out from major cities that may already have recreation or conservation projects being done in them.



¹ Social Explorer Map showing Oklahoma and Texas census data by counties

When looking through Oklahoma census tract data, the Hispanic population is much smaller overall than it is in Texas. Large cities like Tulsa and Oklahoma City have larger hispanic populations than rural areas, however there are still overall less Latinos in Oklahoma than Texas.

I ended up doing a mix of outreach to both with outreach to smaller cities in Texas, and larger cities in Oklahoma where the Hispanic population made up a large percentage of overall population, or areas where the Hispanic population was a smaller percentage but overall a larger population than smaller areas.

STAFF INTERVIEWS

Overview

In order to form a plan for future outreach, I interviewed current NPS-RTCA staff to understand past outreach plans and learn from previous projects that they have done with Latino communities.

Strategy

An email was sent out to RTCA program managers across all regions asking for staff to email for more information if interested. A separate call for participants was posted in the NPS solidarity group. I was able to interview 5 RTCA staff members and one NPS interpreter at a park site through video calls.

Interview Questions

Biographical Information

1. What is your name and your pronouns?
2. How do you identify? (race, ethnicity, etc.)

NPS-RTCA Background

3. What is your title and position with NPS-RTCA?
4. How long have you been with NPS-RTCA?

Recreation Information

5. What does conservation mean to you?
6. How do you define outdoor recreation?

Past Community Outreach

7. What work experience do you have with Latinx and Hispanic communities?
8. What would you say the frequency of interactions between Latinx and Hispanic communities and RTCA has been in the past? (high, low, etc.)
9. Have you participated in a RTCA project that was targeted specifically towards Latinx and Hispanic communities?
10. What was your experience with that?
11. What do you think could have been done better or differently on that project?

Future Community Outreach

12. What are your Do's and Don'ts when doing outreach for Latinx and Hispanic communities?
13. In what ways do you think that NPS-RTCA can improve outreach to Latinx and Hispanic communities?
14. What does a successful partnership with Latinx and Hispanic communities and NPS-RTCA look like to you?

15. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

16. Do you have any questions for me or the RTCA Austin staff?

Outcome

Interviews were either recorded and saved to a shared drive or I took handwritten notes during them. After transcribing the interviews and notes, I coded the interviews for themes or issues that were common among staff and highlighted major points.

1. Trust is key. If you don't give communities reasons to trust you, then don't expect community participation.
2. Hiring more POC, especially in higher positions.
3. Go beyond research and implement change. Gathering data is necessary but if it does not come with actionable steps or a plan that can be implemented, it is useless.
4. Use the RTCA application not as a barrier but as a tool to help communities. This will take more work upfront but will allow projects to have stronger applications which will lead to higher chances of RTCA assistance.
5. Engagement is needed across all forms of communication. "No one knows what we do. No one knows that we're here." These are commonly heard among RTCA staff so there is a need for marketing RTCA on a local and regional level. Communities can't use RTCA if they don't know about it.

COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

Overview

Outreach was done to participants in areas of Texas and Oklahoma across different organizations or community groups. The purpose of the interviews was to understand why communities or

organizations have never previously reached out to RTCA, how knowledgeable people were of the program, and to find potential future partners and projects.

Strategy

Once areas of interest were established, I researched organizations, community groups, HOAs, and city departments in those areas. The office had already compiled a list of potential contacts, and I went through those as well as added my own. In total I reached out to 28 potential contacts either through email, leaving voicemails, social media messages, or sometimes a mix of the three. I ended up hearing back from 9 contacts and only ended up getting interviews from 4 participants, while 3 more were able to fill out their responses via an email or survey form. In total, I was only able to hear from 7 members of the Latino community. I created an email with information about RTCA, our field office, and the research being done and sent it out to organizations and stakeholders in communities. I also followed up the email with a phone call to let people know an email was sent and asking for a response. Interviews were scheduled either through email or over the phone. Those that could not be scheduled to meet virtually due to time restraints answered the questions asynchronously. All community participants were compensated with a gift bag from NPS-RTCA, estimated value of \$50.

Interview Questions

Biographical information

1. If not anonymous* What is your name?
2. If applicable* What organization/community group are you representing?
3. What is your age, gender, and pronouns?
4. How do you identify? (Latino/a, Latinx, Hispanic, Mexican-American, Chicano, etc.)
5. Where do you live?
6. How long have you been there?

7. What is your job?

Recreation information

8. How much access to the outdoors/green spaces would you say that you have?

9. How do you personally use outdoor/green spaces?

10. What does caring for nature/the environment look like in your community?

11. What does conservation or environmentalism mean to you? Is there a different term you prefer to use?

12. In your own words, what would you say outdoor recreation is? Are there other terms you use for time spent outdoors or outdoor leisure?

Community information

13. Is there a large Latinx/Hispanic community/presence in your area?

14. Do you participate in Latinx/Hispanic activities in your area? If so, are they focused on outdoor recreation?

15. What would you say is the greatest barrier to accessing outdoor/green spaces for Latinx/Hispanics? Would you say language is a barrier for your community?

16. What are cultural/or community considerations that should be taken when reaching out to your community?

17. What do you think about Latinx/Hispanic focused outreach in outdoor recreation and conservation?

Future planning

18. What does your ideal access to outdoor recreation look like?

19. Are there any potential recreation projects in your area or region that you can think of? If so, who would be a good contact for this?

20. Do you have any prior experience with the National Park Service or RTCA? If so, do you know of any past RTCA projects?
21. Do you think that you or your community would reach out to RTCA for support on a project in the future? Why or why not?
22. Is there anything else you would like to add or talk about that may have not come up?
23. Do you have any questions for me or the RTCA staff?

Outcome

Initially there was a lack of response from members of the community. Many people never responded to my first or second contact, either through phone or email, and some that did were not available due to being out of office or other time constraints. Due to my internship being only 12 weeks long, the timing for responses was crucial and did not allow enough time for some interviews to be scheduled. Interviews were either recorded and saved to a shared drive or I took handwritten notes during them. After transcribing the interviews and notes, I coded the interviews for themes or issues that were common among members of the community and highlighted major points.

1. Outreach is wanted and welcomed. As long as it is done with good intention and for the benefit of the community. Many people were glad that someone was asking them about what they wanted to see in their community.
2. Culture and history are key. Acknowledging the space and the people in communities is an important part of the work in equitable recreation and conservation. If you don't understand why a neighborhood may be blighted or what the historical context of the people inhabiting that space is, then your work may fall short.

3. Involve all ages. One quarter of the Latino population² is under the age of 18, making Latinos a force for future change. When doing outreach, including local schools or organizations for children, can make a large impact on families' futures. Latinos also tend to recreate as family units either through sports or activities like going to family parks.
4. Understand barriers. Consider the circumstances under which communities recreate or don't recreate such as time, money, transportation, etc. These need to be taken into account when doing work in the community. Putting in a park doesn't make recreation equitable, but putting in a park with access to public transportation or with a community garden in a food desert, will allow for the community to overcome some of those barriers.

Community Survey

Overview

During Latino Conservation Week, I was able to attend an event at the San Antonio Mission, San Juan. I took this opportunity to increase my contact with the Latino community and to get a larger data set for the research.

Strategy

I created a short nine-question Google Form that participants could fill out on their phones. The survey was in English and in Spanish and I created a QR code that could be scanned to bring up the survey. I was hoping to get 10-15 survey responses during this 3 hour event.

² U.S. Census Bureau <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221>



Outcome

I was able to hand out one page flyers and information about RTCA during the event but was not able to get any responses on the survey. I find that this was due to the event having a smaller Latino turnout than expected. Even though there were about 100 people who came through the mission and participated in the events, many of them were tourists who happened to be visiting the mission the day the event was happening and not participants who were there for the event. However, I was able to speak to people about RTCA and educate other volunteers and NPS staff about what RTCA does. Community engagement through events like these are necessary in getting RTCA information out to more people and organizations. Events like these should be sought out in the future in order to create a presence in communities.

FINDINGS

Understanding how Latinos use outdoor spaces is an important part of outreach. When we talk about conservation and outdoor recreation, people already have an “idea” of what that looks like and it often excludes Latinos and communities of color. In my interviews with the Latino

³ QR Code of Google Form questionnaire in Spanish

⁴ QR Code of Google Form questionnaire in English

community, I asked people to define outdoor recreation, conservation, and environmentalism. These words, familiar to those who actively participate or work in those fields, can often alienate those who don't use them regularly. I found that in choosing to not ask "Are you an environmentalist?", and instead asking, "What does caring for nature and the environment look like in your community?", it can allow people to connect to conservation efforts that may not have been related to previously.

In order for future outreach to be successful, it is important to firstly understand why it is being done. A goal needs to be made clear and shared with the communities who are a part of the outreach. Intentions are important for community members and must be shared in order to build a trusting relationship between them and RTCA staff.

LIMITATIONS

The possibility of creating a list of potential future projects for the RTCA Texas field office was an expectation that was not met. This outreach plan was formed in order for there to be an increase in applications from targeted communities. However, the lack of knowledge about RTCA limited my interactions with people from what could be done, to explaining what RTCA does. I spent most of my outreach informing people about the RTCA program and answering questions about what my research was for and how the National Park Service is not just site parks, but also community assistance programs.

Although I think that the final result was a step in the right direction for outreach, I would continue to do outreach not for data collection or for finding potential projects, but outreach targeted specifically at informing communities, city and state officials, and even NPS staff that is not aware of RTCA, about the program and the potential that exists. There is a dire need for getting more information about RTCA out to the public, organizations, and potential partners. Unless this issue is addressed, RTCA will continue to see a lack of applications from underserved communities who do not know that RTCA exists.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Taking everything that has been shared from RTCA staff and community members, I have outlined recommendations for the NPS-RTCA Texas field office in order to move forward with outreach in Latino communities in Texas and Oklahoma.

1. Increase awareness

While doing outreach, it became evident that RTCA is not known among communities, organizations, or state and city officials in Texas and Oklahoma. The purpose of my outreach was to increase awareness and find a list of potential future outreach projects. While I was able to connect with people that were interested in a relationship with RTCA, their understanding of what RTCA can do for their communities needs to be expanded and follow up is needed in the future. Once these communities or potential partners have a more established relationship with the RTCA Texas office, it will most likely increase the chances of them reaching out to RTCA assistance for future projects.

2. Increase in POC Staff

While it is not always feasible for every office to be staffed in a way that is reflective of the outreach community, it is important to make an effort. In many cases, representation can be increased through the selection of interns or fellows who are reflective of the communities they will be assisting. Many of the community members that I spoke with emphasized the importance of outreach being done by someone who is from their community or area. The impact of being able to relate to members of the community will help build lasting relationships between RTCA and communities.

3. Increase in dedicated time and effort

Expect to dedicate more time and effort in a project that comes from an underserved community. Parts of the process, from designing a plan to submitting the application, will sometimes take more effort up front. View this as an investment into the communities that will allow for lasting relationships to be built and will allow the NPS-RTCA legacy to be upheld and implemented for future generations

4. Invest in youth

Latino communities are invested in creating spaces for future generations. Creating partnerships with community groups like the Boys and Girls Club, local churches, and schools is vital for future partnerships. Many of the community members stated that they would like to see outreach geared towards families.

5. Follow up

Not all outreach efforts will create potential projects and some that are created may not be successful all the way through. However, continuing communication and contact with communities will allow for trusting relationships to be built. Doing outreach and collecting data may be useful but if communities feel that they have given information to RTCA and then never hear a follow up or have unanswered questions, it can lead to feeling as though they were just used to gain information. Being honest and upfront with what is done and how it is being done, whether that's projects or outreach, will allow communities to remain trusting of government programs.

BEST PRACTICES

Do

- Do your research. Know the history of the area that you will be doing work in.
- Know the community that you are reaching out to
- Understand why you are doing what you are doing? Who does it benefit? Who is it for?
- Build trust and lasting relationships
- Understand that outdoor activities are family-centered and not just solo activities
- Engage with youth
- Take heritage and culture into consideration
- Understand the barriers (time, money, equipment) that communities face

Don't

- Generalize Latinos
 - Latinos can come from a myriad of cultural backgrounds
- Think it is the same as working with a community that has experience with RTCA. Expectations are different for different communities
- Promise something that you can't deliver. If you don't know if you can do it, don't say you will.

CONCLUSION

In order for there to be successful partnerships with Latino communities across Texas and Oklahoma, and potentially across the U.S. and its territories, there needs to be a well-intentioned effort from the NPS-RTCA program. While the time and effort spent doing outreach may be seen as a barrier, it needs to be considered as an investment into communities in order to create a more just and equitable access to outdoor recreation and conservation.

This document is meant to be a part of a larger effort by the RTCA Texas field office to be more accessible to communities of color. Other outreach projects created by the RTCA Texas field office are the Indigenous Outreach Strategy (2021) and the Black Engagement Outreach (ongoing).

Not every recommendation or outreach will be successful across every community. Some generalizations may still come up through this document but the effort to continue outreach in good faith to communities of color through the RTCA program is necessary.

Every effort must be done to acknowledge Latino communities and credit them for their participation, their skills, and their knowledge. Consider members of the communities as experts and allow them to educate you on what is needed in their communities.

Continue to build trust and to give communities reasons to reach out to RTCA for assistance.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Julissa Acre, *Someone Like Me*

Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*

John R. Chavez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest*

Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader*

Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* by

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*

Martin Sanchez Jankowski, *City Bound-Urban Life and Political Attitudes Among Chicano Youth*

Brian D. Joyner, *Hispanic Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Hispanic Heritage*

Alfredo Mirande, *The Chicano Experience*

Luis Alberto Urrea, *The Devil's Highway: A True Story*

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera*

James Diego Vigil, *From Indians to Chicanos: The Dynamics of Mexican-American Culture*

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