



Civil Society Structures Serving Latinos in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area

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Over the past decade, the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area has become increasingly diverse, driven in large part by the growth of the Latino population. During the 1990s, the number of Latinos in the D.C. metro area nearly doubled; by 2006, there were almost 610,000 Latinos in the region. Latinos are roughly 12 percent of the metro area's population and the region's fastest growing group.

Today's immigrants, like those before them, contribute to the development of civil society organizations and rely on them for services and activities. These organizations, composed of both community-based nonprofits and religious congregations, offer programs and supports that foster greater social capital and cohesion among the newcomers, encourage their civic engagement and political participation, and strive to maintain the cultural identity of ethnic-immigrant populations. Yet little is known about these organizations and the ways they help newcomers build and engage in civil society in the Washington, D.C., area.

This brief provides an overview of the number, size, and scope of nonprofits in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region that are primarily devoted to offering essential services and support to the Latino population. It also reports on religious congregations that work with the Latino community. The study focuses on locally based organizations rather than the national nonprofits housed in the D.C.

region. While national organizations have an important role in shaping the policies and services that affect immigrant populations, locally based groups may be more typical of nonprofits and religious congregations elsewhere in the country that work with ethnic-immigrant groups.¹

Locally based nonprofits were identified using data from the Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS), a national repository of 501(c)(3) organizations that file with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Seventy-five groups that filed IRS returns between 2003 and 2005 met our criteria as community-based organizations serving the Latino population and are included in the analysis.

Religious congregations serving Latinos were found through the Hispanic Yellow Pages, the Hispanic Pastoral Ministry of the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, and other sources. From these lists, 116 congregations were identified that in some way served the Latino population. Many telephone numbers listed in these sources were not current (many small churches, for example, tend to move often), and in many cases, we were unable to reach anyone in the congregations. Thirty-seven congregations agreed to participate in the telephone survey, which asked about the size and scope of their programs, the resources available to them, and the challenges they face.

For further information on this topic, see Guillermo Cantor, "Nonprofits Serving the Latino Community in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area: A Portrait of Their Features and Activities" at <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=411647>.

Key Findings

This study revealed ten essential facts for understanding how the Latino immigrant population in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area is served:

1. **There is wide diversity in the types of services and activities offered by Latino-serving nonprofits in the D.C. region.** Because the NCCS data classified nonprofits by their primary service, the data do not reflect the full complexity of services and activities. Based on this classification system, however, the most common types of Latino-serving nonprofits are those focused on education, including English as a second language, literacy, and computer training services; children and youth services, such as child care, gang violence prevention, tutoring and mentoring, and sports programs; religion-related activities, which may include a wide array of social services; and ethnic and immigrant centers, which are often multi-service centers structured to meet social, educational, economic, recre-

ational, and other needs specific to the Latino population. Combined, these four types of providers account for 57 percent of Latino-serving nonprofits in the study (table 1).

According to a 2004 survey conducted in the District of Columbia, health issues constitute one of the most challenging problems affecting Latinos in the D.C. area. Forty-two percent of Latinos in the District had no health insurance, and 32 percent had not seen a doctor in over two years (McClure and Jerger 2005). The health needs of local Latinos are being addressed by a handful of community-based, health-related nonprofits (9 percent). These groups include community clinics, mental health counseling centers, health support groups, and substance abuse prevention and treatment centers.

Other types of Latino-serving nonprofits focus on arts and culture (8 percent), housing and shelter (5 percent) family services (5 percent), and legal services (4 percent).

TABLE 1. *Types of Nonprofits Serving the Latino Population in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area*

Type of nonprofit	Number	Percent
Education	13	17
Children and youth services	11	15
Religion-related	10	13
Ethnic and immigrant centers	9	12
Health	7	9
Arts, culture, and humanities	6	8
Housing and shelter	4	5
Family services	4	5
Legal-related	3	4
Senior centers	2	3
Civil rights, social action, and advocacy	2	3
Community improvement and capacity building	2	3
Employment	1	1
Developmentally disabled centers	1	1
Total	75	100

Source: The Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics Core File (Public Charities, circa 2005).

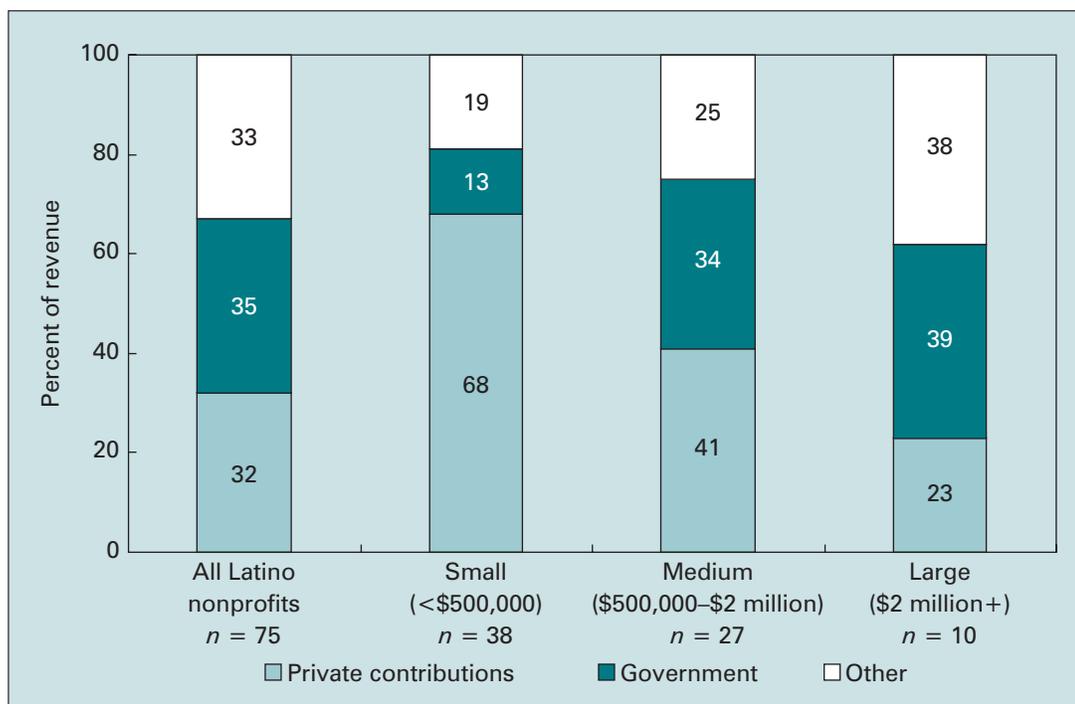
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

2. **Most nonprofits serving the Latino population are relatively small, so they often struggle to meet the demands of this growing community.** The financial picture of Latino-serving nonprofits generally reflects the small, grassroots nature of these organizations. More than half of them have budgets below \$500,000, and only a handful (about one in eight) operates with budgets of \$2 million or more. For the most part, Latino-service nonprofits in the region have few assets to draw upon in times of financial need. Forty percent of these groups have assets below \$100,000, and an additional 10 percent report assets between \$100,000 and \$200,000. Only 7 of the 75 nonprofits in the study had assets of more than \$3 million.
3. **Financial support for Latino-serving nonprofits in the D.C. region comes almost equally from government sources, private contributions, and “other” sources, such as membership dues and special events; the larger**

nonprofits receive most of the government funding. In total, Latino nonprofits in 2003 reported roughly \$67 million in revenues.² Government funding from federal, state, and local sources accounted for about 35 percent of this total, while private contributions and other revenues were about 32 percent each. Government funding is concentrated in the very large organizations. Large Latino nonprofits received 70 percent of the government dollars, which substantially affected their operating budgets.

Not surprisingly, government support represents nearly 40 percent of the operating funds of large Latino nonprofits, compared with 13 percent of the operating funds for small groups (figure 1). In addition, government support tends to be concentrated in Latino nonprofits that primarily provide health services (40 percent), education (29 percent), and family services (14 percent). Providers that offer children and youth services, housing, and

FIGURE 1. Sources of Revenue for Latino Nonprofits in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area, by Budget Size



Source: The Urban Institute, GuideStar-National Center for Charitable Statistics National Nonprofit Research Database (2003).

legal services, for example, receive less than 3 percent, each, of these government funds.

The lifeline of the small Latino nonprofit is contributions from individuals and grants from private foundations. More than two-thirds of their funding comes from private contributions. Without this support, these small groups might have a difficult time sustaining their programs.

4. **Latino-serving nonprofits operating today are fairly new to the region, with roughly two-thirds of them forming since 1990.** The number of Latino organizations filing Forms 990 with the IRS between 1991 and 2005 increased by 150 percent (from 30 to 75). This jump in new Latino nonprofits coincides with the increase of Latino migration to the region and an upsurge in the visibility of Latinos in the area. The latter was provoked in part by the Mount Pleasant riots in 1991, which intensified the mobilization of the community. Both the creation of new organizations and the consolidation of older ones suggest the availability of funds for social programs targeted at the Latino community since the 1990s. Indeed, analysis of NCCS data shows that total annual revenues for Latino groups in the D.C. region increased from \$13 million to \$87 million between 1991 and 2005.
5. **There is a potential mismatch between where nonprofit services are provided and where Latinos live in the metro area.** Latinos in general, and Latin American immigrants in particular, are widely dispersed through the D.C. region. Although there are some important concentrations of Latino immigrants in such areas as Columbia Pike in Virginia, Langley Park/Hyattsville and Silver Spring/Wheaton in Maryland, and Mount Pleasant/Adams Morgan in the District of Columbia, Latin American immigrants are not clustered in ethnically homogeneous residential enclaves (Singer et al. 2001). Further, the Latino popula-

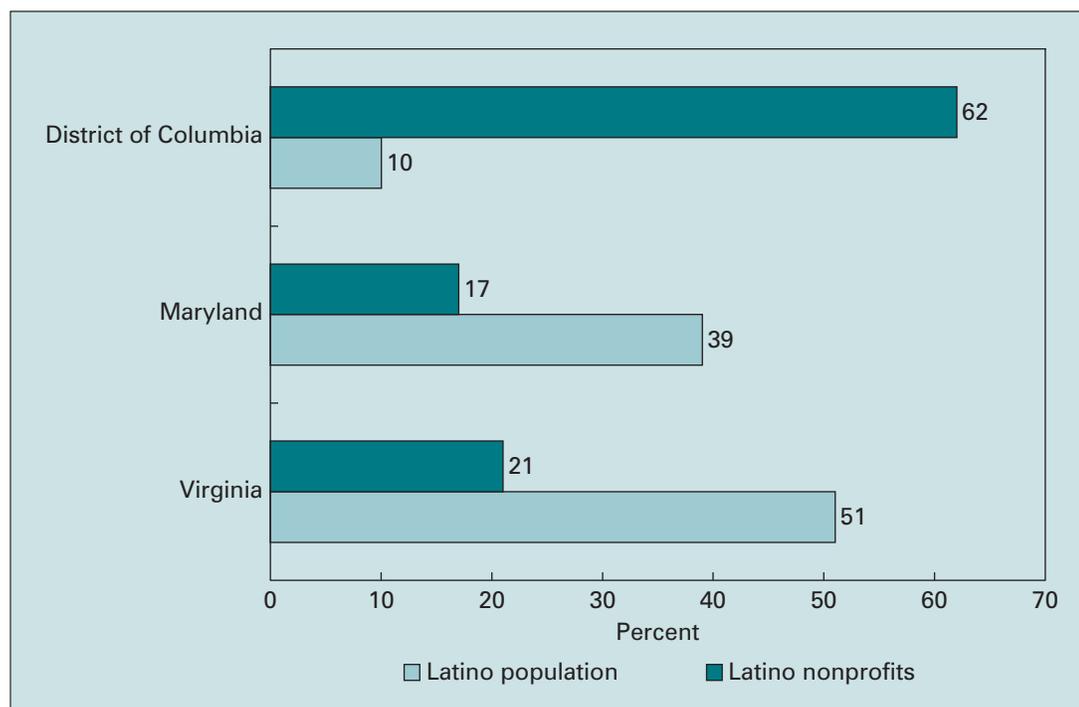
tion in the region underwent a noticeable suburbanization during the last decade. In 2000, only 10.4 percent of the Latino population in the metropolitan area lived in the District of Columbia—down from 14.6 percent in 1990.³

The geographical dispersion of the Latino population contrasts sharply with the concentration of Latino organizations in the District of Columbia. Over 60 percent of organizations in the region are located in the District (figure 2). The remaining organizations are split between Virginia (21 percent) and Maryland (17 percent). This concentration is accentuated by the fact that 90 percent of the large organizations (those with total revenues of at least \$2 million) and 74 percent of medium-size organizations (those with total revenues between \$500,000 and \$2 million) are located in the District. By contrast, most (55 percent) of the smaller organizations are located in the Maryland or Virginia suburbs.

6. **Compared with nonprofits, churches tend to provide more informal and emergency-related services.** Churches carry out a broad spectrum of activities beyond their spiritual missions. Three-quarters of the congregations surveyed said they performed activities beyond worship services for the Latino community. Supplying food (through food pantries or soup kitchens), providing financial help to the needy, and offering English language lessons are the three most frequent activities. Other common activities include supplying clothes, giving talks, offering legal assistance, and providing specialized education programs.

The services provided by congregations often address emergency situations. For example, financial help and food assistance are frequently provided to people who are in special need as the result of temporary unemployment or extraordinary circumstances. These service programs tend to be somewhat informal, dictated by the flow of finan-

FIGURE 2. Location of Latino Population and Nonprofits Serving Latinos in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area



Sources: The Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics Core File (Public Charities, circa 2005) and Census 2000, Summary File 1, 100-Percent Data.

cial resources. Programs are started and discontinued intermittently as funding is available. Most of the congregations surveyed rely almost exclusively on private donations to carry out their services. Only a few received funds from other sources, such as fees for service (e.g., when they have a school attached to the church) or the ecclesiastical dioceses or mother institutions they are linked to.

7. **The Maryland and Virginia suburbs have numerous churches that serve the Latino community, in part reflecting the residential patterns of the Latino population.** Churches serving the Spanish-speaking community are highly dispersed across the D.C. metro area and have a singularly important presence in the suburbs. Of the 116 churches identified as specifically serving the Latino population, approximately 20 percent are located in the District, with the remainder located in the suburbs of Maryland and Virginia.

In our sample, 19 percent of the congregations surveyed are located in the District, 32 percent in Maryland, and 48 percent in Virginia. This geographic dispersion suggests that religious institutions may more easily reach the Latino population than their nonprofit counterparts.

8. **Churches that help Latinos bridge the cultural gap tend to be larger and more diverse.** Among the congregations surveyed, membership in small congregations tends to be entirely Latino. As congregation size increases, so does diversity. More than 90 percent of the small congregations (with fewer than 200 members) reported that all their members were Latino, whereas only 20 percent of the larger congregations (with 1,000 or more members) have such an ethnic makeup. Large congregations appear better able to develop social capital that bridges across different social, economic, and ethnic groups. In fact, some respon-

dents indicated that social and humanitarian programs conducted by the church were possible because of the investment that the “American” parishioners made to help minorities in need.

9. **Collaboration is an integral part of how congregations provide services.** Although many congregations directly provide services to Latino residents, an important part of their work is accomplished through informal collaborations with other community organizations in the local area. Eighty-eight percent of the congregations surveyed reported working with other community organizations or churches. Sometimes churches make their space available to other groups to provide services, such as health screenings, vaccinations, orientation on Social Security, workshops on citizenship and immigration paperwork, training in computer usage or English language skills, or information on affordable housing. At other times, the staff and volunteers of congregations collaborate with other organizations that are providing services—for example, engaging in programs to prevent children from dropping out of school, serving as translators in teacher-parent meetings, or accompanying Latino members of the church to the doctor to facilitate communication and overcome language and cultural barriers.

Inter-organizational cooperation also takes place through informal referral practices. In some cases, churches operate as a source of information about the availability of services in other organizations when the church cannot directly help an individual or family. Conversely, other organizations may refer individuals to a church for a particular service.

These mutual referrals are generally with organizations where there is an established pattern of cooperation. Many of these links come from long-established ties with community service groups that either depend on the church for referrals or received financial support from the church in their early years.

Embassies of Latin American countries also partner with churches in outreach activities that are oriented toward their citizens who reside in the D.C. area. Such activities generally are related to immigration paperwork.

10. **Religious congregations serve directly and indirectly as sources of community empowerment.** Although some congregations interviewed showed reluctance to be associated with politics, many of them either directly or indirectly engage in activities leading to the empowerment of the Latino community. Among the congregations in our survey, 54 percent indicated that they worked with other organizations, volunteers, and attorneys who come to the church to help individuals with their problems, particularly those with questions regarding obtaining documentation such as drivers’ licenses, citizenship applications, or Temporary Protected Status forms. Such assistance may range from helping people with specific requests, to offering talks on citizenship and immigration, to referring people to places where they can receive professional help.

Engaging in advocacy activities is somewhat less frequent than direct provision of services but not uncommon. For example, congregations in the study encouraged people to attend rallies (40 percent) and to sign petitions

(32 percent). Several respondents said that public participation was encouraged by talking about policy issues during sermons, allowing advocacy groups to use the church fellowship hall, or talking informally or “unofficially” about public policy issues. About a quarter (24 percent) of the respondents reported engaging in campaigns that would benefit the community they serve.

Implications

For more than a decade, the number of Latinos living in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area has grown, and, at least in the short run, this trend shows no signs of abating. These newcomers present new challenges for the social and economic institutions of the region.

As this brief shows, a considerable number of nonprofits and churches in the D.C. metropolitan area are assisting the Latino population, but the majority of them are small and fairly young organizations. Some of the growth in nonprofits may be in response to the growth of the population. As more Latinos arrived in the region, more nonprofits and congregations were formed to address their needs. But the pattern may also suggest that young organizations face more constraints to survival than older ones.

Financial strength and stability often take time to achieve. Younger organizations may need to diversify their funding base to scale to capacity for addressing the needs of the Latino community. Interestingly, the level of government support for the Latino nonprofit sector in the Washington, D.C., region is low (35 percent) compared to the share that government funds represent for immigrant/ethnic organizations in some other locales. In New York City, for example, gov-

ernment funds represent 56 percent of the budgets for immigrant/ethnic organizations (Cordero-Guzman 2005); in San Francisco, it also is over 50 percent (deGraauw 2007). The reason for this difference is not clear, and further study is needed to assess which jurisdictions and levels of government are providing the most financial support for Latino nonprofits in the metro area.

In addition, more needs to be known about access to services. Although spatial proximity is often perceived as an indicator of access,⁴ users of District services quite frequently reside in the suburbs.

In recent years, some of the large organizations serving the Latino community in the District of Columbia have been adapting to the new geodemographic reality by either opening new facilities in the suburbs or providing expertise to other organizations that provide services in counties in Maryland and Virginia. Indeed, the proportion of new organizations created in D.C. compared with those in the surrounding jurisdictions has decreased since 1970. Likewise, the creation of new organizations tends to be moving increasingly to the suburbs.

Finally, in its structure, the Latino organizational capital bears a greater resemblance to a network of actors variously linked among themselves and with the community than a collection of discrete organizations. Churches, with their widespread presence and manifold links with nonprofits, play a critical role in both expanding and making a wide variety of resources available to the community. An examination of the patterns of collaboration among ser-

vice providing Latino nonprofits in the area would contribute to a more dynamic understanding of the actual and potential impact of the sector in the community.

Notes

1. Because Washington, D.C., is the nation's capital, many national organizations are headquartered in the region. Although national organizations are not generally involved in local problems, their location in the area occasionally makes them central actors in local politics regarding Latino issues.
2. Because of lags in data processing, the most recent data that give detailed financial information is for 2003. Information on total revenues, expenditures, and assets reflect 2005 data.
3. From the Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF1), 100-Percent Data, and Census 1990 Summary Tape File 1 (STF1), 100-Percent Data.
4. For example, see Truelove (2000) and Hutcheson and Dominguez (1986).

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