

Integration, Competitiveness AND Prosperity IN THE HEARTLAND



Omaha's

**Hispanic and Business
Communities**

Integration, Competitiveness and Prosperity in the Heartland: Omaha's Hispanic and Business Communities

SUPPORTED BY THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

This working paper provides a general background on the Hispanic community in Omaha, Nebraska—one of the country's new gateway cities for new immigrants. It documents how businesses, community and religious organizations and the local government are working both to promote the socioeconomic integration of Latinos—and immigrants overall—and to maximize their overall contributions to the Omaha metropolitan area. At this time of renewed national attention to the rights of immigrants—sparked by local and state legislation (Arizona SB 1070) that present new obstacles to their integration—the Omaha area is an example of immigrants' contributions and of how positive, community-wide efforts can create an atmosphere that fosters greater immigrant contributions.

The findings presented here follow a roundtable meeting in Omaha where Americas Society and Council of the Americas (AS/COA) convened local and national business executives, community leaders, public officials, and others to share concrete experiences of how to promote Hispanic workforce development and integration. A draft of this paper was presented at that meeting. While our research is comprehensive, it does not claim to document all initiatives throughout the metropolitan area—our primary focus has been on the work of business and the larger community groups.

"Omaha's Latino population has proven that they are entrepreneurs, they are risk takers. They've gone on and started family businesses. Those family businesses are trading with each other and that means jobs and that is an important part of the Omaha economy."

-Jim Suttle, Mayor of Omaha, NE, in an exclusive interview with AS/COA. December 11, 2009.

This is the second in a three-part series of working papers focusing on new gateway cities. In September 2009, AS/COA released *Economic Opportunity and Integration: Nashville's Hispanic and Business Communities*. The next paper in this series will focus on Portland, Oregon. Through these working papers, AS/COA aims to promote greater business attention to how integration programs are beneficial to both business and the community and demonstrate the social and economic contributions of Hispanic immigrants. We thank the National Business Council of this project for their continued support, and in the case of Omaha, our two local partners: Omaha Community Foundation and Nebraska Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Omaha is an example of the nationwide growth of the Latino population and its dispersal to new gateway cities. Between 1990 and 2008, the Hispanic population in the city grew 338 percent and the overall foreign-born population increased 234 percent.

In 2008, Omaha's Hispanic population had grown to 45,156, or 11.6 percent of Omaha's population.¹ As a comparison, Latinos accounted for 15.4 percent of the U.S. population at that time. Meanwhile, the immigrant population represented 8.1 percent (31,408 people) of Omaha's population in 2008—below nationwide statistics that estimated immigrants as representing 12.5 percent of the U.S. population.² When the 2010 Census results are released at the end of this year, expectations are that the data will reveal a sizable increase in the percentage of Latinos and immigrants overall that live in Omaha and the United States.

The growth in the Omaha area is explained, in part, by the expansion or relocation of meatpacking plants in the area in the 1980s. This created a demand for low-wage labor in the plants as well as in the service and construction sectors, which has been filled mainly by Hispanic workers, mostly Mexican and Central American. The Latino and overall immigrant population are recognized as engines of economic growth and have been welcomed by a highly developed network of social service providers, philanthropists and business leaders. Yet, as documented by *The Task Force on the Productive Integration of the Immigration Workforce Population (2000)*, immigrants are at a disadvantage due to language barriers, limited access to education, health services, housing, transportation, and unsafe conditions at the workplace. This creates impediments to their advancement in their jobs and in the community.

"We've been very fortunate in Omaha that a number of larger employers in the general market were really among the first to say, 'Hey, there's a big population here. They have needs like everybody else has needs. We have to get together and find ways to serve these people.'"

-Jim Timm, General Manager, Connoisseur Media (Omaha, NE), in an exclusive interview with AS/COA. December 11, 2009.

However, the private and public sectors and community groups in greater Omaha have identified the need to scale-up programs that seek to address these barriers to integration. The bulk of integration programs in Omaha focus on strengthening English-language skills, increasing access to the financial system and improving health care, with some programs serving as models for other new gateway cities. At a time of limited financial resources, the success of these efforts will depend on working across sectors and building on some of the already-established collaborations in the community—many of which are not widely known but could serve as a model for how to address Latino integration.

As part of its nationwide integration efforts, Americas Society and Council of the Americas (AS/COA) have documented how businesses, community organizations and local government are working to facilitate Latinos' socioeconomic integration in Omaha and why integration programs benefit both employers and the larger community. Since 2007, AS/COA, through primary and secondary research and in-person local meetings, have worked in new gateway cities like Omaha to support the further integration of immigrant workers into businesses and local communities and to give a greater voice to a more mobilized and visible business sector on issues of immigrant integration. At this time of critical debate on immigration legislation and the backlash against immigrants, AS/COA believe that greater integration and appreciation for immigrants' contributions to society help to change perceptions at the local and national levels.

BUSINESS BEST PRACTICES

The *AS/COA Hispanic Integration Initiative* has identified examples of corporations in key sectors of the U.S. economy that promote the integration of the Hispanic population. This working paper highlights examples from the Omaha area. Best practices are catalogued by type of activity:

● ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRAINING

In Omaha, Paxton & Vierling Co., Creighton University, Tyson Foods and ConAgra Foods provide English-language training at the workplace or off-site as a way to foster a better work environment, reduce social tensions at the workplace and in the community, and enable their businesses to provide better services and increase productivity. In turn, companies such as Union Pacific have provided Spanish-language training and cultural awareness programs for their employees to promote better communication and understanding of the Hispanic community. Noteworthy examples of other companies in the United States that promote language training for employees are Miller and Long Concrete Construction, Tecta America Corporation, Western Union, Northrop Grumman Corporation, Chick-Fil-A, Hospital Corporation of America, Shoney's, and Bank of America.

● FINANCIAL LITERACY

First National Bank, Wells Fargo and US Bank are among some of the financial institutions working to improve Hispanics' financial literacy. Through initiatives that facilitate access to banking services, credit, mortgages and loans, and bilingual banking materials they provide Latinos with increased opportunities for economic and social integration. Tyson Foods has developed a relationship with some of these banks to help employees open accounts. L.G. Roloff Construction Co. Inc. supports its employees

"We offer banking materials in Spanish and English and help people through the financial process so that they feel comfortable with home ownership and banking."

- Deborah J. Keating, Vice President and Director of Community Development, First National Bank (Omaha, NE), September 21, 2009.

by establishing a savings fund that they can draw from during the off-season. Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Citizens Home Loan, Inc., and Western Union are other companies doing this at the national level.

● **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

Job training, leadership development and skills development provide Latinos with increased opportunities to perform well and to have access to better jobs and wages. Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company, Wells Fargo, Cox, ConAgra Foods, US Bank, State Farm Insurance, Creighton University, First National Bank, and Union Pacific are part of initiatives such as the Heartland Latino Leadership Conference that support leadership development and provide scholarships to Latino students. In addition, First National Bank and Wells Fargo sponsor the Midlands Latino Community Development Corporation's business training programs for Latinos. Northrop Grumman Corporation, Manpower, Intercontinental Hotels Group, Nissan North America, Inc., and Western Union are among other companies that develop life and work skills among Latino workers.

● **ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE**

Through Spanish-language training, bilingual health care materials and information campaigns directed specifically to Hispanics, One World Community Health Center, The Latino Center of the Midlands, The South Omaha Community Care Council and a number of hospitals and clinics in Omaha are addressing some of the limitations in access to health care resulting from language and cultural barriers. These services are supported by companies such as ConAgra Foods, Inc., Omaha Steaks, Wells Fargo Bank, US Bancorp Foundation and US Bank. At the national level, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer and Hospital Corporation of America are also reaching out to Hispanic customers, as is Ochsner Health Systems in New Orleans.

● **CIVIC PARTICIPATION**

Information about citizenship and voting rights is a way to encourage Hispanics' political participation, promote civic values and reinforce immigrants' desire and commitment to root themselves in the fabric of their community. The Omaha Community Foundation has established the Futuro Latino Fund to support civic, cultural and socioeconomic initiatives within the Latino community. The Heartland Latino Leadership Conference (HLLC) supported by donors such as Wells Fargo, Mutual of Omaha, Cox, ConAgra Foods, US Bank, and State Farm Insurance, develops skills for community professionals and businesses. At the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS), in partnership with the Heartland Workers Center and other community organizations have engaged in a multi-year civic engagement and leadership development project.

I. Introduction

As a nation of immigrants, the United States has been defined by the contributions of different ethnic groups to building culturally diverse communities and enriching the American society through complementary abilities. The integration of immigrants, defined as their full participation in and commitment to the host society and their exercise of corresponding rights and obligations, can be measured by their socioeconomic and political participation, their upward mobility and their ability to communicate in English. However, integration is not an automatic process; it is developed through generations and shaped by many factors including the characteristics of the immigrants as well as the contexts of their communities. Both immigrant groups and the host society participate in the process of integration.

Civil society groups have historically played a key role in immigrant integration in the absence of a formal federal policy. But business and local government can also facilitate further integration into local communities either independently, with community groups or across sectors.

Another component for successful integration is for the native population (including ethnic groups from previous waves of immigration) to understand and accept new

“It is the sentiment among many that Latinos have revitalized South Omaha.”

-David López, *The Latino Experience in Omaha: A Visual Essay*, 2001, photograph 13.

immigrants. For example, greater awareness of Latinos’ economic contributions—as consumers with a collective purchasing power surging to \$870 billion in 2008, or as entrepreneurs that owned at least 2.2 million firms in that year—can help to reduce the backlash against immigrants by those who do not understand the Latino population’s economic

contributions. As part of a two-way process, immigrants must seek to integrate, as most want to, but they must also be afforded feasible ways to do so.

The Americas Society and Council of the Americas believe that the public and private sectors should promote dialogue and collaboration to further facilitate the integration of all Latinos—and immigrants overall—in the United States. Greater integration will allow for upward socioeconomic mobility, and at the same time, set the stage for more balanced local and national policies toward immigrants. We recognize the key role that businesses and employers play in promoting cohesion and integration among the Latino workforce. Successful integration at the workplace benefits immigrants, fellow workers, employers, communities, and the overall economy and society.

II. Omaha: A Re-emerging Gateway for Hispanic Immigrants³

The Latino population in Omaha has grown significantly since the late 1980s but Latinos have been part of the community since the 1880s.⁴ Most of the recent migration to Omaha, which consists mainly of Mexicans and Central Americans, is explained by the expansion or relocation of meatpacking companies to rural areas in a context of depopulation of most of Nebraska's counties (83 out of 93 counties experienced population loss in the 1980s)—making Nebraska a “re-emerging” destination for Mexican immigrants and a new destination for immigrants from Central and South America.⁵

Attracted by jobs, the Hispanic population in Omaha grew 338 percent between 1990 and 2008. According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey, Omaha's Hispanic population of 45,156 accounts for 11.6 percent of the city's population.⁶ This is also reflected in population changes at the state level. Between 1990 and 2008 Nebraska's foreign-born population grew faster than that of any other Midwestern state (247 percent), representing the twelfth-largest percentage increase of foreign-born individuals of all U.S. states.⁷

"Our challenge is not really a lack of ideas but focusing on building a philanthropic understanding of why funding services for underserved populations is important. We need to educate people about this challenge and bring together the necessary resources to generate positive change."

- Tadd Pullin, VP Marketing, Planning and Network Operations, The Nebraska Medical Center, November 25, 2009.

Another factor that explains the growth of the Latino population is the large number of children born to immigrant parents. Gouveia and Powell explain that “by 2004, a much larger proportion of Latinas (20.6 percent) than white women (13.2 percent) or African-American women (14 percent) were in their 20s, an age band commonly associated with peak levels of fertility.”⁸

An estimated 53.8 percent of Nebraska's foreign born in 2004 were from Latin America. Mexicans account for 75 percent of these individuals while Guatemalans and Salvadorans make up the second-largest foreign-born group. Among all second-generation immigrants in Nebraska, 24 percent are from Mexico and about 8 percent are from other Latin American countries.⁹

Latinos, who comprise 80 percent of the meatpacking workforce, have been important for the economic growth in Omaha and across Nebraska.¹⁰ Since the 1980s Latino professionals are increasingly working in the health care industry, schools, universities, and social service agencies.¹¹ Their presence has revitalized downtown businesses, created additional jobs, boosted property values and tax revenues, and increased wages for non-immigrants.¹²

A 2008 report by the University of Nebraska documents that the state's immigrant population makes a substantial contribution to the labor force, particularly in sectors such as construction, hotel and food services, and meat, poultry, and fish processing. This study also estimates that **total state production would fall by \$13.5 billion if immigrants were not present in these sectors, about 8.75 percent of total state production.** If just the Hispanic immigrant population were removed from these sectors, the resulting loss to the state would be \$11.4 billion.¹³ This labor has also allowed Nebraska to expand production, particularly in less densely populated regions.¹⁴

"Immigrants add \$1.6 billion annually in spending to the state's economy and fill a critical role in the work force."

-"Report: Immigrants inject \$1.6B into Neb. Economy", by Jean Ortiz, The Associated Press, October 15, 2008

But Latinos face challenges in terms of access to social services, low education levels, high dropout rates, and workplace safety due to the city's and state's lack of experience in dealing with this migration, limited availability of higher paid jobs, and new immigrants' demographic characteristics. As in other new immigrant gateway cities, this population growth has fueled racism and discrimination.

A number of state and local initiatives are positive indicators of the government's response to the growing immigrant population. The business community is also increasingly involved in promoting workforce development programs that allow for worker mobility. As well, community-based organizations and social service agencies have provided a support system for this population. But there is still a need for greater public and private support and collaboration to advance language, education and health service programs and to construct a broader public dialogue about the immigrant population and its contributions to the Omaha metropolitan area.

III. Challenges and Opportunities for Integration in Omaha

Similarly to trends at the national level, Latinos in Omaha show positive signs of integration, particularly by the second and third generations, in terms of language acquisition, education, homeownership, and civic participation. The community's work ethic, cultural and ethnic solidarity, strong family ties, high levels of community involvement, and the support they receive from community groups and immigrant advocates are key to this process of integration. However, they face barriers such as high poverty levels, discrimination and fear of backlash, insufficient skill acquisition opportunities, a high number of uninsured, low education levels, and high dropout rates. Studies also show, among other items, the need for immigrant integration policies at all levels of government and greater access to adult education opportunities (including ESL courses), especially for the first generation.

Employment and Income

The majority (44.2 percent) of Nebraska's foreign-born population (16 years and older) work in production and transportation (which includes meatpacking), while 38 percent work in services and construction. Often these jobs offer few opportunities for upward mobility due to low wages and limited opportunities to acquire skills in a labor-intensive environment.

However, one of the results of the growth of the immigrant population in Omaha has been the creation of mid-level jobs, which has opened opportunities for first-generation immigrants and their children. In fact, median household income in Nebraska increased 19 percent between 1990 and 2000.¹⁵ Home ownership rates tripled each year between 1999 and 2002, while self-employment rates increased, and Latino-owned businesses grew at double the rate of other minority businesses (just below African Americans).¹⁶ At the same time, a 2008 University of Nebraska study found that immigrant spending in 2006 yielded an estimated \$1.6 billion in total production to Nebraska's economy, generating between 11,874 and 12,121 jobs.¹⁷

"It's important that we have employees that can help us grow as a company, and we found that with a number of Latinos that we hire."

-John Sunderman, CEO, Paxton & Vierling Steel Co. (Council Bluffs, IA), *in an exclusive interview with AS/COA. December 11, 2009.*

Education and English language proficiency¹⁸

The majority of immigrants from Mexico and Central America come to the U.S. with low levels of education, which usually translates into low income levels and high poverty rates. Among adults in Nebraska (ages 25 to 65), 73.8 percent of first-generation Mexicans have less than a high school diploma compared to 20.6 percent of immigrants from other countries. In contrast, 87.5 percent of the total Omaha population 25 years and over has a high school degree.¹⁹ Expanding opportunities to learn English and vocational training programs for adults are key to reduce the educational gap. Only 2.6

percent of Mexican adults have a four-year college degree, but nearly 40 percent of those from other countries have that level of education.²⁰

But the second generation shows significant improvement. Only about 25 percent of Mexican-origin migrants lack a high school diploma, nearly one-fourth (22.8 percent) have a college degree and 54.5 percent are enrolled in school. This is similar to the second generation from other countries.²¹ Nebraska's largest school district, the Omaha Public School District (OPS) has a high concentration of Latinos and other minorities (22.6 percent of students enrolled in 2006 were Latino).²²

Children, particularly from the first generation, are faced with the challenge of balancing school with the need to contribute to their family's financial situation. The Educational Attainment in Nebraska survey, conducted by Lourdes Gouveia and Mary Ann Powell in 2004 and 2005, found that the majority of first-generation high school children (55.2 percent) and over one-third of second-generation high school children (38.4 percent) had to work to help their parents. Only 18.2 percent of third-generation respondents said the same.²³ Still, this survey reported that about 70 percent of Latino children would need a scholarship to be able to attend college.

"Today, it may appear that training people and making sure that they have skills is not necessary because unemployment is somewhere around 10 or 10.2 percent, and we have 18 million people without jobs. But eventually, our economy is going to improve and we're going to need all the workers available, so we have to make sure that we are always training people."

-Rodrigo Lopez, CEO and President, AmeriSphere (Omaha, NE), in an exclusive interview with AS/COA. December 11, 2009.

Access to language training is also key to children's success in schools and parents' advancement in the workplace and in the community. According to the Migration Policy Institute, the foreign-born, limited English proficient (LEP) population age 5 and older in Nebraska increased by 24.4 percent between 2000 and 2007, bringing the statewide total to about 52 percent. Approximately 72 percent of these people speak Spanish at home.²⁴ Although these rates improve by the second and third generations, first-generation immigrants and their children face disadvantages as a result.

Health

Latinos are less likely than other immigrant groups in Omaha to have health insurance and receive preventive care due to their type of employment, cultural barriers and limited availability of transportation.²⁵ In Nebraska Latinos often suffer from occupation-related injuries, particularly in meatpacking plants where cuts, breaks and repetitive motion injuries are frequent and often not reported. Other common problems facing the Latino community are a high number of teenage pregnancies, substance abuse, obesity, and depression.

A large number of Latinos do not obtain proper care due to lack of information, fear of losing their jobs or lack of insurance coverage. Another common problem is the distance as public transportation is not ideal and clinics can be far away from their workplace or community.²⁶ Cultural and language barriers as well as lack of familiarity are also a problem even if many clinics offer bilingual services.

Civic Participation

Omaha offers a positive context to increase civic participation and community organization.²⁷ Academics and community-based organizations have filled a void of information and civic engagement, bringing government attention to issues affecting the community as well as stopping some of the proposed anti-immigrant initiatives.

There had been an increasing recognition that “state and local laws on illegal immigration must be ‘careful and measured,’ or they could drive large employers out of rural Nebraska.”²⁸ But in April 2010, the Nebraska Supreme Court ruled that the city of Fremont, Nebraska—located less than one hour from Omaha—must go forward with a special election this summer on a petition measure that would bar city residents from hiring undocumented immigrants and from renting living quarters to those who cannot prove their citizenship. The City Council had previously rejected the measure.

“The trickle-down effect of companies losing money due to reduced staffing levels from employees’ fear of showing up for work as well as people simply in fear of going out in public is unfathomable. When sales decline, expense cuts must be made and the resulting damage will be felt by a web of other businesses.”

—Jim Timm, General Manager, *Connoisseur Media (Omaha, NE)*, in a statement prepared for AS/COA in reaction to ratification of SB 1070 in Arizona. April 29, 2010.

However, the Fremont case should be seen in the context of positive developments at the state level. In 2000, for example, the Nebraska Legislature created The Task Force on the Productive Integration of the Immigration Workforce Population, which recommended, among other things, modifying the state aid formula for schools, improving the targeting of housing resources to the new immigrant workforce, building a more effective public health infrastructure accessible to all populations, and considering “welcome centers” for workforce development boards to connect new immigrant workers with good, stable jobs. Other positive examples include the Non-English Speaking Workers Protection Act and the Meatpacking Industry Workers’ Bill of Rights of 2003, which protect workers against unsafe and unsanitary conditions in meatpacking plants and guarantee their right to organize.

IV. Integration in Omaha: Best Practices and Challenges

In response to the growth of the Latino population and the gap between available services and community needs, a number of non-profit groups (migrant and non-migrant based), unions, government offices, religious organizations, and businesses have developed a network of support and community organization.

Through site visits in Omaha, in-depth interviews and a half-day roundtable meeting with business leaders, community organizations and the public sector, AS/COA has identified a strong sense of commitment to broadening and deepening existing integration programs. The private and public sectors and community groups recognize the need to more frequently communicate about both the work being done to address integration needs and the impediments faced in securing resources or in generating sufficient Latino population.

“Omaha is nationally known as a place with successful cross-sector collaboration. We need more of that focused on immigrant integration in Greater Omaha.”

-Patrick McNamara, Director of Philanthropic Services, Omaha Community Foundation, November 30, 2009.

But with the majority of Omaha’s Latino population living in South Omaha, the topic of integration must be repositioned as a city-wide imperative, not just one that pertains to one section of Omaha. Latino professionals can also play an instructive role as mentors in the community that help employees, employers and students to better understand the value of continued education. Throughout Omaha, many communities already exist to address various aspects of integration, but a group with an over-arching approach could help to coordinate activities and scale-up discrete initiatives.

In an effort to document how businesses, local government and community organizations are working to promote the integration of Omaha’s Latino—and overall immigrant—population, AS/COA has interviewed leaders across sectors to document many of the best practices and remaining challenges. For employers, more effective integration increases worker loyalty, reduces employee turnover and absenteeism and boosts worker productivity and motivation, thereby increasing efficiency and competitiveness. Other benefits include strengthened social capital, greater opportunities for upward mobility and increased income, which is injected back into the economy. Select integration programs in Omaha are described in the next section.

I. WORKFORCE AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT: EDUCATION, LANGUAGE AND SKILLS TRAINING

Increasing immigrants' access to education and skills development opportunities and improving English proficiency strengthens the position of workers and their families in the community and promotes participation, diminishing isolation and discrimination. At the same time, skills development provides Latinos with increased opportunities to perform well and to access better jobs and wages. For employers, as seen below, facilitating the development of their Hispanic and Hispanic immigrant employees allows for in-house talent and know-how to be reinvested in the business. This approach spares employers recruiting costs, but also it helps workers stay motivated with a vision toward their future.

Language Training at the Workplace (English and Spanish)

- Recognizing the diversity of its staff and the importance of communication among employees and with clients, **Tyson Foods** offers English-language training and encourages the mentoring of limited English proficient workers. Tyson Foods operates two major plants in Greater Omaha. Its larger, more established plant in **Council Bluffs, IA**, has 1,300 employees with about 60 percent Hispanic, while the **Omaha** plant (purchased by Tyson in 2003) has 700 employees and 40 percent of its front-line supervisors are Hispanic.

The certified interpreter training program in Council Bluffs covers 14 languages, and all employment managers are bilingual. Employees receive 100 percent reimbursement for ESL/GED courses and 80 percent for college courses. An education fair was held at the plant in November 2009 to facilitate interaction between workers and potential schooling opportunities. The Omaha plant is currently building the interpreter program and its training program.

- **ConAgra Foods**, which is headquartered in Omaha, offers ESL programs at the workplace and promotes diversity initiatives in the community.
- Omaha-based **Union Pacific Railroad** has a Latino Employee Network that offers Spanish language classes to non-Spanish speaking employees. The Latino Employee Network has members across 23 Western United States, and about half-dozen locations around the Union Pacific network have started satellite chapters. Members participate on recruiting teams and collaboratively work in their local communities.

ESL Programs

- **Creighton University** offers ESL classes to employees at the university. It also has a Diversity Scholarship program that selects 60 students from a nationwide pool based on their leadership in a marginalized community. The program pays 80 percent of their tuition and enrolls the students in a leadership development training and community service program.
- **Omaha Public Schools (OPS)** is now part of the Learning Community, an umbrella organization established by the government with two main goals: integration and distribution of resources. As part of these programs, OPS offers ESL programs for students and parents and opportunities for parents to learn how their children can attend college. OPS works with Metro Community College through the Bridge To Success program where African American, Native American and Latino students can take college courses while in high school.

Scholarships and Small Business Development

- **Radio Lobo**, Omaha's largest provider of Spanish-language radio content, uses its in-house marketing staff to teach small, general market businesses how to target Latino consumers. In the past, this effort has included collaboration with the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce.
- **The Midlands Latino Community Development Corporation (MLCDC)** is a non-profit that provides training, leadership skills and access to capital for the local immigrant community. With the support of sponsors such as **Wells Fargo Bank and First National Bank**, MLCDC provides affordable training programs on the basics of starting and nurturing a business, applying for loans and building a credit score. To address language access barriers, it is also establishing an online directory and database of information on all services with bilingual representatives or staff. To date, one of the most successful programs undertaken is in training Latina women how to start and run a home-based day care for infants and young children. Three classes have completed the program since October 2008 and 14 out of 42 graduates have established daycare businesses.
- **Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company** started an employee resource group, Latino Employee Connections, which organizes events for the community and meets with students in local schools through its Winners Circle program. The company uses INROADS to recruit minority college students and offers them actuarial scholarships. A leadership development curriculum sends employees to classes that focus on how to serve on nonprofit boards. An in-house management training program is being expanded to serve a greater number of employees.

- **Union Pacific Railroad** supports the scholarship programs of three employee resource groups. The Latino Employee Network presented 10 students with \$1,000 scholarships per person in 2009, totaling \$46,000 over the last four years.

Adult Education Programs and Skills Training

- Over the course of two years, **Paxton & Vierling Steel Co.** worked with Metropolitan Community College to train potential employees, helping to fill its need for sophisticated welders while giving immigrants an opportunity for skills training and a permanent paycheck. The program corresponded to Metro's semester schedule, with four to five Latinos graduating at a time. In total, 20 people came through the program. Students learned English, warehouse management and software skills and received a \$1,000 per semester scholarship. Given the economic downturn, the program is temporarily suspended but could be restarted when the labor need arises.
- **First National Bank of Omaha** has offered space to provide financial educational services and ESL classes to families in South Omaha.
- The **University of Nebraska at Omaha** is home to the **Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS)**, a transnational center dedicated to the incorporation of the new and growing Latino population. College of Education and OLLAS faculty member, Dr. Gigi Brignoni, coordinates the first and only state Bilingual Education Endorsement Program, which integrates Latino and non-Latino Spanish-language students as they develop and enhance their bilingual classroom teaching skills. The Office of Recruitment Services employs a full-time bilingual community outreach coordinator and conducts numerous workshops with potential students and parents about college life and the need for a college education.
- **The Latino Center of the Midlands** works to improve the quality of life for Latinos. Its main focus is adult education, including preparation for GED in Spanish, ESL programs. Rebecca Valdez, Executive Director, reports a 60 percent success rate for its GED program and a waiting list of around 200 people, which exhibits the great need for these services. The Latino Center also offers computer training programs and tax preparation courses. Through the support of donors, including **First National Bank, Cox Businesses, Ford Motor Credit Company, The Nebraska Medical Center** and others, the Latino Center offers scholarships for college and supports students with applications, financial aid workshops and ACT/SAT preparation.
- **Catholic Charities** has offered microbusiness training classes for the past 15 years through its Juan Diego Center. The two-month training (40 hours) covers

basic business concepts, registration and licensing information, the legal process, and the principals of drafting a business plan. The curriculum was developed, in part, through collaboration with the Nebraska Business Development Center and classes are co-taught with First National Bank staff. Catholic Charities also offers one-on-one business coaching/consulting and free QuickBooks training. All information is provided in Spanish. In 2008, 75 individuals enrolled in the microbusiness training courses and a total of 1,400 hours of one-on-one business consulting was provided to 375 individuals. Twenty-seven businesses were launched in 2008 as a result of these initiatives. They also provide \$3,500 loans to help individuals launch businesses and have plans to begin a training program for aspiring restaurant owners in 2010.

II. FINANCIAL LITERACY: ACCESS TO FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND HOUSING

Improving immigrants' financial literacy opens the door for access to banking services, credit, mortgages and loans. In the long term this allows them to support their children's college education, make investments or purchase a home—indicators of stability and a long-term commitment to both their communities and jobs. For business, these programs help to improve communication with the community and are a useful tool to enlarge their customer base.

Financial Literacy Training Programs

- **Fannie Mae** and **Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA)** have provided educational and loan assistance programs for immigrants and local organizations such as the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Omaha Housing Authority, Lincoln's Urban development Department, Grand Island's Multicultural Coalition, and Sudanese resettlement and assistance agencies.
- With a focus on investing in people and family, **L.G. Roloff Construction Co. Inc.** supports its employees (25-30 percent of whom are Hispanic) by establishing a savings fund (the Winter Fund) that they can draw from during the off season. The company also offers translators during employee meetings on profit sharing, benefits, etc.
- In 2005, **First National Bank** founded the ***Centro Latino de Educación Financiera (CLEF)***. **CLEF** provides access to financial information, resources and services to small business owners and the local community. It is a Hispanic-serving center for financial education whose mission is to help build financial literacy and contribute to the prosperity of the Omaha community. Since 2006,

over 3,200 students have benefited from classes in financial education, home buying, Money Smart, and micro-business.

- **Tyson Foods** has developed a relationship with banks such as Wells Fargo, First National Bank and US Bank to help employees open accounts.
- **Wells Fargo** offers an online financial education program titled *El futuro en tus manos* and has trained over 120 people to teach the program in the community. The bank also offers financial classes in partnership with Omaha Public Schools.
- The Omaha **Earned Income Tax Credit** Coalition (a program of the Family Housing Advisory Services) connects clients with asset-building programs and tax return preparation services through their relationship with local banks, community groups, churches, and government. They offer services at 12 sites (two sites certified to accept ITNs), and 36 percent of volunteers are bilingual. The program also offers basic services in Spanish.

Bilingual Financial Services

- **First National Bank** offers bilingual banking materials to help customers understand the financial process and the tools for establishing a credit history, applying for a home loan and becoming a home owner.
- **Wells Fargo** provides a range of bilingual, bicultural services at its South Omaha branch as well as community outreach services designed to make the bank a part of the community.

III. HEALTH CARE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE

Employers that facilitate access to preventative health information and health care increase the productivity of their workers and reduce the high costs associated with emergency room use. At the same time, the workplace and the community's overall quality of health is improved by encouraging smart lifestyle choices.

Bilingual Access to Health Care and Social Services

- **OneWorld Community Health Centers, Inc.**, previously known as the Indian-Chicano Health Center, was founded in 1960 with its comprehensive list of services dating back to 1973. Seventy-six percent of patients were Hispanic in 2008, and the majority of patients seen at the center are newcomers. The clinic provides health services—medical, dental and behavioral health—based on a sliding scale, regardless of patient's insurance coverage or ability to pay.

Annually, 19,000 patients receive care. OneWorld has played a role as an employer in the area and offers employees tuition reimbursement, schooling to become certified, interpreter certificates, and loan repayment assistance. **American National Bank**, philanthropic giving and foundations support the clinic's work.

- **The Latino Center of the Midlands** offers an out-patient program to support individuals with substance abuse or dependence disorders. It provides information and training to promote access to health care and offers disaster preparedness, First Aid/CPR and certified babysitting classes.
- In May 2006, **Pfizer Pharmaceuticals** sponsored the conference Latino Health Issues for Primary Care Providers: Achieving Better Health Outcomes University of Nebraska Medical Center—the first of its kind in Nebraska. **Pfizer** is also one of the sponsors of **One World Community Health Center**.
- The **University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC)** identified a need to reach out and provide primary care to the Latino population and other underserved groups in South Omaha. Through the **SONA Family Health Care Center, UNMC** provides health services based on a sliding scale according to the patient's income. The clinics as well as the medical center offer translation services and have made an effort to create materials in both English and Spanish. UNMC was one of the first medical centers to launch campaigns in Spanish to reach the Latino population.
- **The South Omaha Community Care Council (SOCCC, Inc.)** offers the Spanish Language Diabetes Educational Program to address one of the most common diseases among the Latino population. In collaboration with OneWorld Community Health Centers and The University of Nebraska Medical Center Diabetes Center, SOCCC provides training to non-Spanish speakers on the cultural aspect of care delivery to the Latino Community. The Lions Club provided funding for this service. SOCCC also maintains a comprehensive health prevention and maintenance program, *Como Mantenderse Saludable* (How To Stay Healthy), to address community health. *Por el Amor a la Familia* is a Spanish-language parenting program to help at-risk families adjust to life in a new culture. It seeks to develop awareness regarding the effects of child abuse and ways to prevent it.

IV. CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Providing information about naturalization and civic participation can encourage political participation, promote civic values and reinforce immigrants' desire and commitment to become proficient in English and root themselves in the fabric of

communities.

- In summer 2009, various companies came together for the first time to promote "Diversity Week." This was a break from the past as it signaled collaboration rather than the historical trend of companies competing for limited resources. Participating businesses included **Mutual of Omaha, Wells Fargo, ConAgra Foods, Omaha Public Power District, and Union Pacific Railroad**. The event emphasized the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace and raised the profile of Omaha as a community that seeks out and welcomes diverse talent.
- **ConAgra Foods** has developed partnerships with local and national Latino organizations, including the National Council of La Raza, the National Hispanic Corporate Council, the Hispanic Association of Corporate Responsibility and Jobs for Progress to advocate on issues related to the community and promote diversity awareness. It has participated in the citizenship workshop day to help immigrants in their naturalization process.
- The new **Kroc Center**, which began operations in November 2009, has three gyms, three pools, an education wing with eight classrooms, and a computer lab operating in partnership with the University of Nebraska at Omaha.
- The Heartland Latino Leadership Conference (HLLC), supported by donors such as Wells Fargo, Mutual of Omaha, Cox, ConAgra Foods, US Bank, and State Farm Insurance seeks to develop skills for community professionals and businesses and to maximize leadership development. It also provides a forum for the community to learn and discuss issues that impact the community. HLLC's annual conference offers \$15,000 in scholarships to Latino students per year. Over the past 10 years, HLLC has awarded more than \$115,000 in scholarship funds.
- **El Perico** offers a yearly *Directorio Latino* that is similar to consumer-based yellow pages with information on how to access city services, health and education issues and updates on immigration. The Directorio, like *El Perico*, is available in 250 locations.
- At the **University of Nebraska at Omaha, OLLAS'** engagement and leadership development project has allowed hundreds of workers and their families to learn about and actively participate in legislative and policy processes at every level of government. Workshops are facilitated by local, national and international experts.
- In mid-2009, the **Omaha Community Foundation (OCF)**, one of the 30 largest nonprofit community foundations in the country, established the **Futuro Latino Fund (FLF)** to support civic, cultural and socioeconomic initiatives within the Latino community of greater Omaha. The FLF was established with a 13-member

committee made up of leaders from many sectors of the community. In this first year, OCF awarded more than \$120,000 to 13 non-profit organizations focused on culture and language preservation, capacity and leadership-building and skills training organizations. Among the first grantees were the Heartland Workers Center, the Midlands Latino Community Development Corporation and the South Omaha Community Care Council. **The Sherwood Foundation, the William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation, the Lozier Foundation and American National Bank** support the fund.

- **The South Omaha Community Care Council (SOCCC, Inc.)** focuses part of its efforts on youth violence education and gang prevention through the program Every Shot Is Through The Heart.
- The *Centro Laboral* or **Heartland Workers Center** seeks to increase political and civic participation among migrant workers and their families. Through the program Building a Community that Works for All, the Center provides leadership classes for workers and their families, predominantly Spanish speaking meatpacking, construction, hospitality, and day laborers. Funded by the Mammel Foundation, the center also has medical, legal, academic, and other professional partners that offer guidance to low-wage laborers and their families.
- **Radio Lobo** offers free or low-cost air time for public service announcements from community groups, including the Midlands Latino Community Development Corporation. Its Community Connection talk show (Wednesdays at 8:00 p.m.) focuses on issues relevant to Omaha's Latino community, including immigration, health care and education.

V. Conclusions and Next Steps

The businesses and community groups mentioned here are making headway toward facilitating the process of integration for Latinos and other immigrant groups. As in other new gateway cities, they have recognized that the integration of immigrant workers increases business competitiveness through a better-trained, stable and loyal workforce that has the experience and training required to move up the professional ladder. Through these practices, employers also promote social cohesion in and outside the workplace and improve working conditions, all of which contribute to maximizing business productivity.

Yet, there is more to be done to increase community-wide buy-in of the importance of integration, and to highlight immigrants' many socioeconomic contributions in the Omaha metropolitan area. As documented, the Latino population has revitalized South Omaha and Latino immigrant spending has created thousands of jobs throughout the state. **Greater understanding and awareness** of immigrants' positive economic effects would help to prevent anti-immigrant measures such as the petition measure to be voted on in Fremont, Nebraska, in summer 2010. These measures can lead to profiling that affects all Latinos.

Participants in an AS/COA roundtable meeting in Omaha agreed that integration is a two-way street, and in addition to working with Latinos and the overall immigrant population, the host community needs to be educated about the value of immigration. There is a need to promote messages that present the community in a positive light, reflecting the diversity of immigrant experiences, interests and intellect within the community, and breaking down stereotypes.

In addition to promoting positive messaging, local leaders identified the need for greater results-driven collaboration in the community. In fact, many partnerships already exist in the community but they are not widely known, and could serve as a model for how others can work together to promote greater integration. In Omaha, the challenge is clear: the issue of immigrant integration is being addressed by only a handful of people without the participation of the city leaders that have the power to affect real change. The private sector needs to get more involved in initiatives that promote integration, since the Latino population and immigrants overall are the key to Omaha's future competitiveness. Greater integration will generate positive economic effects throughout the community.

"If we are not able to attract and retain well qualified people from all perspectives, we're going to be at a risk that's just not tolerable for the corporation."

-Roy Schroer, Assistant Vice President of Human Resources, Union Pacific Railroad Company (Omaha, NE), in an exclusive interview with AS/COA. December 11, 2009.

Beyond moving the issue of integration to a city-wide policy that involves private-sector executives, community leaders working with AS/COA identified three specific areas in

which they can further collaborate to support Latino and Latino-immigrant integration: adult education; financial literacy; and access to capital. To promote the value of education, Latino professionals should get more involved in the community and in the schools to emphasize why education is critical for lifetime success. In cases where limited English-language skills is a challenge for upward mobility, AS/COA has found that successful ESL and Spanish-language programs include take-home language instruction, workplace classes and incentives for off-site courses offered at times and locations convenient for employees with multiple demands.

At the same time, employers and financial institutions should step-up efforts that teach the basics of finance. A greater effort should also be placed on teaching financial literacy at a younger age so that youth can learn how to save money. This could involve building on the partnerships that already exist between select financial institutions and local public schools. Finally, lack of access to capital can stifle immigrants' socioeconomic advancement. One of the best ways to address this is a community accessible resource on how to build capital.

For Americas Society and Council of the Americas this working paper was intended to draw attention to the changing demographic and economic landscape of Omaha, Nebraska—a new gateway city in the U.S. heartland. The efforts by businesses and community groups to promote integration—although room still exists for improvement—should serve as models for other new gateway cities. Regrettably, with the exception of Tyson Foods, the meatpacking industry in the Omaha area declined to participate in this initiative.

NOTES

¹ “Omaha City, Nebraska,” ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2008, Data Set: 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

² “Omaha City, Nebraska,” Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: 2008, Data Set: 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

³ Throughout this research, we have benefited from the advice and comments of a number of experts and scholars in the field, to whom we would like to express our gratitude. While not a comprehensive list, among them are Lourdes Gouveia, David A. López, José Villegas, Rebecca Valdez, Deborah Keating, Alberto Cervantes, and Patrick McNamara. We would also like to thank our senior researcher, Alexandra Délano, for her work in preparing this document. Any errors in this background paper are the responsibility of the project leaders. Comments are welcome and can be sent to Jason Marczak, Director of Policy, Americas Society and Council of the Americas: jmarczak@as-coa.org.

⁴ David A. López, *The Latino Experience in Omaha: A Visual Essay*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 2001, p. 4.

⁵ Lourdes Gouveia, Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, Yuriko Doky, Alejandra Toledo and Sergio Sosa, “Omaha: Sociedad Civil Migrante en Construcción”, paper presented at the Woodrow Wilson Center conference *Latino Immigrant Civic Engagement Trends*, June 26, 2009, p. 7.

⁶ “Omaha City, Nebraska,” ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2008, Data Set: 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

⁷ Aaron Terrazas and Jeanne Batalova, MPI Data Hub, Migration Policy Institute, accessed May 8, 2010. (<http://www.migrationinformation.org/DataHub/acscensus.cfm>)

⁸ Lourdes Gouveia and Mary Ann Powell, “Second-Generation Latinos in Nebraska: A First Look”, Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute, January 2007. (<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=569>)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ López, *The Latino Experience in Omaha: A Visual Essay*, p. 84-85.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 18.

¹² Lourdes Gouveia, “Nebraska’s Responses to Immigration”, in Greg Anrig and Tova Andrea Wang (eds.), *Immigration’s New Frontiers*, New York, The Century Foundation Press, 2006, p. 160.

¹³ Christopher Decker with Jerry Deichert and Lourdes Gouveia “Nebraska’s Immigrant Population: Economic and Fiscal Impacts”, University of Omaha, Office of Latino/Latin American Studies, October 2008.

<http://www.unomaha.edu/ollas/Econ%20Im%20Report/FINAL%20Econ%20Impact%20Report.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Lourdes Gouveia, Miguel A. Carranza and Jasney Cogua, “The Great Plains Migration: Mexicanos and Latinos in Nebraska”, in Victor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández León, *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2005, p. 44.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 44.

¹⁷ Christopher Decker with Jerry Deichert and Lourdes Gouveia “Nebraska’s Immigrant Population: Economic and Fiscal Impacts”, University of Omaha, Office of Latino/Latin American Studies, October 2008

<http://www.unomaha.edu/ollas/Econ%20Im%20Report/FINAL%20Econ%20Impact%20Report.pdf>

¹⁸ More data and statistics on education achievement among Latinos in Nebraska can be obtained from the Mexican American Commission’s publications: Lourdes Gouveia and Mary Ann Powell, “Educational Achievement and the Successful Integration of Latinos in Nebraska: A Statistical Profile to Inform Policies and Programs” (<http://www.mex-amer.state.ne.us/Project1a.pdf>), “The Educational Status of Hispanics in Nebraska: A Statistical Profile” Volume 1 and Volume 2 (<http://www.mex-amer.state.ne.us/english/mac%20publications.html>)

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey (see also Gouveia and Powell, “Second-Generation Latinos in Nebraska...”).

²⁰ Gouveia and Powell, “Second-Generation Latinos in Nebraska: A First Look.”

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

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- ²⁴ Migration Policy Institute, MPI Data Hub, "Nebraska", <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/state2.cfm?ID=NE> (accessed on November 19, 2009).
- ²⁵ López, *The Latino Experience in Omaha: A Visual Essay*, p. 86.
- ²⁶ Ibid. pp. 87-88.
- ²⁷ Gouveia, et al., "Omaha: Sociedad Civil Migrante en Construcción", p. 13.
- ²⁸ Martha Stoddard, "Immigration's economic implications," *Omaha World Herald* (July 22, 2008).