

# LEAP: A MODEL FOR INCREASING LATINO CIVIC PARTICIPATION

## Overview

Hispanic\* voters are the fastest-growing segment of the electorate, and a key constituency in building a strategy to win the White House.<sup>†</sup> In the current landscape Republicans must earn over 40% of the Latino vote, while Democrats must reach over 60%, as evidenced by the past victories of Presidents Bush and Obama. In 2004, President George W. Bush won reelection with an estimated 40% of the overall Hispanic vote, with Colorado, Florida, Nevada, and New Mexico in his column.<sup>1</sup> In 2008, President Obama won with 67% of Latino support, swinging those four states to the Democratic column. Traditionally associated with California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas, the Hispanic population is growing nationally, and Latino voters are a growing factor in many other states—in the 2008 presidential election, for example, Hispanic voters participated in numbers greater than the margins of victory in North Carolina and Indiana.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this growth, gaps in Latino voter participation still persist. In the 2008 election, for example, 19.5 million Hispanics were citizens of voting age, yet only 11.6 million were registered to vote and of those, 9.7 million actually voted.<sup>3</sup> A number of factors contribute to this situation. The most considerably resourced electoral outreach is connected to traditional political campaigns, and these tend to not target Hispanic voters extensively, nor are they designed to close the gap between the number of eligible voters and those who are registered and voting. Campaigns and candidates must improve their strategies to energize Latinos—the National Council of La Raza’s (NCLR) previous “Latino Vote” series report, *Engaging the Latino Electorate*, identified examples of promising

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### WHAT IS LEAP?

- NCLR created the Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Program (LEAP) in 2001 to strengthen the nonpartisan foundation for greater Latino participation in the political process.
- LEAP is a network of Latino community-based organizations across the country—primarily service-providers—that engage unregistered, newly registered, and infrequent voters. LEAP partners focus their efforts on nonpartisan, repeated voter contact and education, using modern campaign and outreach tools.
- NCLR provides training to its community partners in order to identify the most effective ways to incorporate electoral participation into their operations.

\* The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

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In addition, NCLR consultants Jessica Luevano and John Miyasato, of Crossroads Campaign Solutions, Inc., contributed heavily to the content of this report, and staff of Crossroads Campaign Solutions contributed substantially to the implementation of various aspects of the LEAP model described within. Crossroads Campaign Solutions is a political consulting firm providing essential services for successful political campaigns, business ventures, and nonprofits; in 2008 and 2010, they worked closely with NCLR to provide LEAP grantees with technical training, support, and materials.

candidate strategies that generated Hispanic engagement in the 2010 election cycle—but this alone will only go so far. Greater investments in areas outside the realm of traditional campaigns are needed to close the gaps, with an emphasis on cultural competency to help eligible immigrants become citizens and connect with the hardest-to-reach members of the community, and strategies that seek to lessen the impact of indicators often associated with lower electoral participation and which affect electoral participation, such as age, mobility, and economic status.

A growing number of efforts work to develop these new interventions and break the traditional campaign paradigm. As part of its efforts, NCLR launched a community-based nonpartisan civic engagement program, the Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project (LEAP), in 2002. LEAP leverages NCLR's unique position as an organization with a network of community-based organizations\*; a solid policy, advocacy, and research operation; and a strong capacity-building approach. The LEAP model combines local-level civic engagement field operations with national polling to increase the understanding of Latino perspectives, and national online and media campaigns that distribute information about the voting process to the broader Hispanic electorate. This community-based model is essential within the larger civic engagement field and operates with two primary goals: 1) expand the Hispanic electorate by bringing new voters into the process, and 2) strengthen the capacity of nonpartisan Latino community organizations to actively engage their constituents in the civic life of their communities.

NCLR identifies partners through its existing relationships with community-based organizations, many of them from NCLR's Affiliate Network, and works with them to

incorporate the best practice of traditional electoral field operations with their cultural competence and local expertise. LEAP focuses on expanding the Hispanic electorate by reaching people who are not typically contacted through other campaigns, including eligible citizens who are not yet registered—young people turning 18 and new citizens—and infrequent voters who are registered but not regularly voting. NCLR provides technical campaign knowledge and support, while local LEAP partners draw on their credibility as trusted community sources of information to engage the clients that visit their agencies every day. By integrating civic engagement into their current services, which range from after-school programs to homeownership counseling classes, these community organizations can connect with the hardest-to-reach potential Latino voters while also increasing their capacity to become agents of change over the long term.

### **EIGHT KEY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NEEDS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

1. Information on permissible 501(c)(3) activities
2. Individualized campaign planning and goal-setting
3. Models for strong civic engagement staffing structure
4. Techniques for building organization-wide buy-in
5. Technical knowledge training
6. Access to technical tools such as voter files and quality control
7. Techniques for recruiting and managing volunteers
8. Ongoing funding

\* Since NCLR was founded in 1968, the body of NCLR's Affiliate Network has grown to nearly 300 community-based organizations. Their services are diverse and include charter schools, after-school programs, job readiness and training, English-language preparation, homeownership counseling, health centers, and community activity centers, to name a few. These organizations provide services that reach millions of Hispanic Americans.

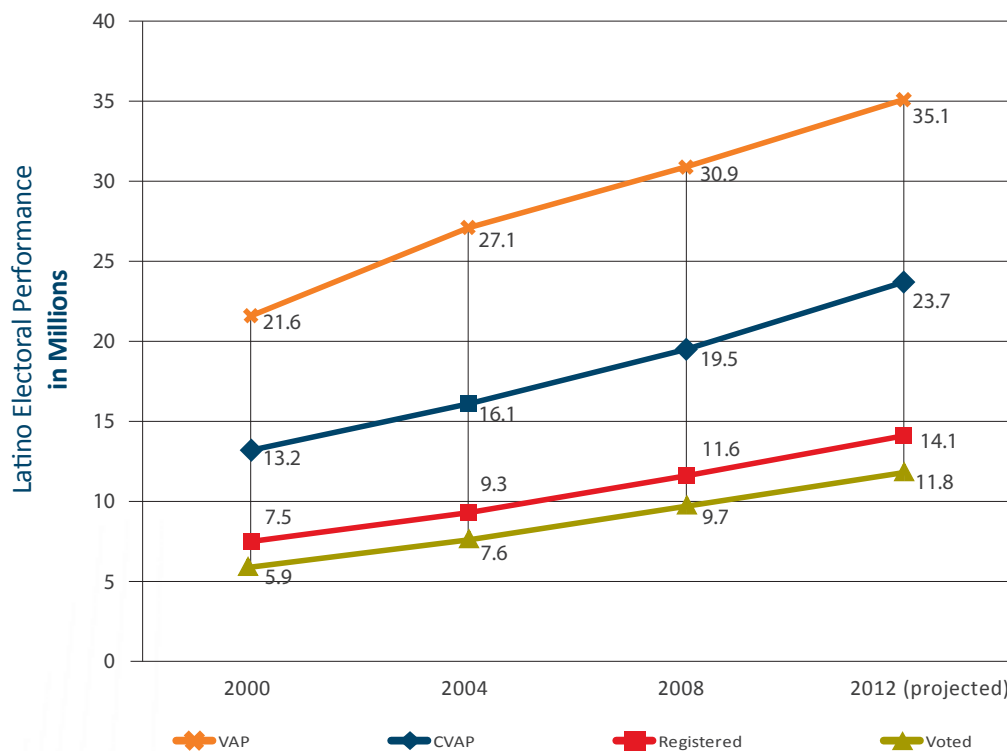
NCLR's vision for its civic engagement work is to create a participation continuum that links eligible Latino immigrants to naturalization, eligible voters to voter registration, registered voters to voting, and the Hispanic community at large to greater involvement in civic life. Although NCLR is engaged in a variety of activities to achieve these goals, this report primarily examines the field component of LEAP and the challenges and opportunities of this approach. The report explores Latino-vote potential, factors impeding its expansion, how organizations can mitigate those factors, and the challenges they face in carrying out effective civic engagement programs. Additionally, the report provides real examples of how community organizations have overcome some of those obstacles and recommendations for how LEAP can be taken to a larger scale. Lastly, case studies throughout the report illustrate how successful LEAP partner programs have helped their local Latino communities achieve greater voter participation and strengthened their own institutions' roles as agents of change.

## Latino Vote Potential and Barriers to Greater Participation

Between 2000 and 2008, the Hispanic share of the national electorate grew by 39%, from 5.4% to 7.4%.<sup>4</sup> During that same period, the population of citizens turning 18, voter registration, and voting numbers grew by 11%, 13%, and 18% respectively, and for Latinos, that growth was 49%, 54%, and 64%, respectively.<sup>5</sup> From 2004 to 2008 alone, Hispanic voter registration grew by 25%, compared with -0.1% for Whites and 8% for Blacks; Latino voting participation grew by 28% in the same period, with 0.5% growth for Whites and 15% for Blacks.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this consistent growth, Latino voter registration and participation is still not commensurate with the Hispanic share of the citizen voting-age population (9.5% in 2008), let alone its share of the voting-age population (13.7%), which includes immigrants not yet eligible to vote.\* The citizen population contains a rich source of potential voters: In 2008, only 60% of voting-age Hispanic citizens were registered to vote, compared to 70% of Blacks and 74% of Whites,<sup>7</sup> meaning that while 11.6 million Latinos were registered, another 7.9 million were eligible but unregistered (see Figure 1).

\* According to the U.S. Census reports on voter registration and turnout, the gap is wider when compared to the total Latino share of the overall population (15.8% in 2009), which in addition to immigrants over 18 not yet eligible to vote (24%), also includes a significant number of Latinos under 18 (34%).

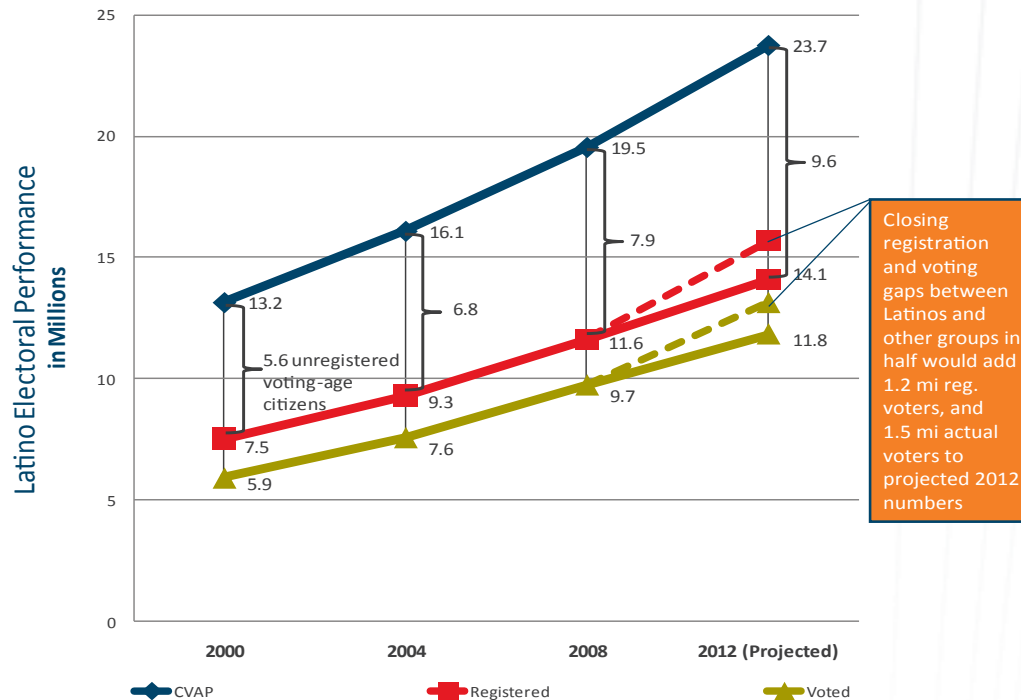
**FIGURE 1.****Latino Voting-Age Population and Electorate, 2000–2012**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2008," Current Population Survey, [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html) (accessed February 10, 2011), Table 4a.

If the 2008 registration gap between Latinos and Blacks—the next performing group—were cut in half, another one million Latino registered voters would have been part of the electorate.<sup>8</sup> Among those registered, Latinos had a high rate of voter turnout—84% of registered Hispanics voted in 2008—although they still lagged behind Whites (90%) and Blacks (93%).<sup>9</sup> Even if registration rates remained the same, closing the voting gap by half between Latinos and the next performing group would have added half a million Latino votes in 2008.<sup>10</sup> And by cutting both the registration gap and the turnout rate in half in the 2012 election, 1.5 million more Hispanics could be added to the total number of votes cast (see Figure 2).

In order to mobilize the Latino community to reach this potential, strategies are needed to counter the factors that have a proven effect on voter participation rates, such as age, economic status, mobility, educational levels, voter identification

rules, and varying state-level voting laws, all of which are disproportionately present in and affect the Hispanic electorate. For example, 31% of eligible Latino voters in the 2010 election were ages 18 to 29, compared to 19% of Whites and 26% of Blacks;<sup>11</sup> an additional 500,000 Hispanic youth reach voting age each year.<sup>12</sup> And a recent poll noted that 19% of Latinos have, at some time in the last 12 months, moved because of financial constraints.<sup>13</sup> With regard to voter identification, studies have shown that laws restricting the types of allowable ID disproportionately impact the elderly, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and those with less educational attainment and lower incomes; in 2004 alone, states with strict ID laws resulted in an estimated net reduction of 400,000 votes.<sup>14</sup> In addition, there are segments of the Hispanic population who are not yet eligible to vote but who will continue to enter the electorate at a rapid pace, including four million Latinos who

**FIGURE 2.****The Latino Electorate, 2000–2012**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2008," *Current Population Survey*, [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html) (accessed February 10, 2011), Table 4a. The 2012 projection calculations were made as follows: The 2012 numbers were estimated by multiplying the 2008 Latino voting age population (VAP) and citizen voting-age population (CVAP) by their respective rate of growth between 2004 and 2008. Projected registration and voting numbers for 2012 were then calculated by multiplying the 2012 CVAP by the 2008 Latino voter registration and voting rates.

are currently eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship<sup>15</sup> and Latinos under 18, of whom 93% are U.S. citizens.<sup>16</sup>

Yet polling, academic research, and previous NCLR reports (see Appendix A), have documented the lack of traditional campaign investments in strategies that seek to expand the electorate. In an effort to ensure that a particular candidate wins, political campaigns develop field programs and concentrate their resources to persuade and mobilize frequent voters. Rarely does a candidate or party campaign focus on expanding the electorate by, for example, investing in strategies that help eligible immigrants navigate the naturalization process and innovations that reach Latinos even before they turn 18, since overcoming these mitigating factors takes significant time and financial investment. The only recent example of a candidate who

made a significant investment in electorate expansion was in the 2008 presidential campaign, when then-candidate Barack Obama emphasized voter registration as part of his "Vote for Change" program, investing heavily in recruiting volunteers for online and site-based voter registration. This strategy ultimately helped him increase his vote share in unlikely places, such as Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia,<sup>17</sup> but it is not clear if this effort employed strategies that reached Hispanic voters or if this strategy will become part of the industry standard.

### Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project: A Model for Success

In order for Latino voter potential to be realized, interventions from institutions outside

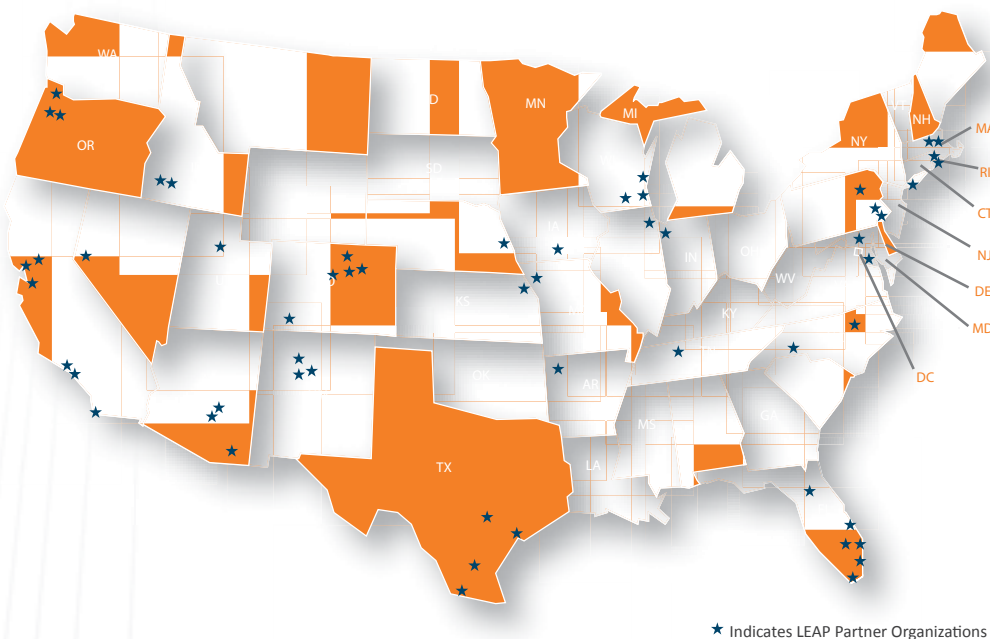


of the traditional candidates and parties are needed. Several nonpartisan campaigns have built programs within the last decade to address these concerns and contribute to expanding Hispanic voter participation. In 2002, NCLR created its own approach—a small, pilot program, LEAP, which seeks to mobilize new and infrequent Hispanic voters by strengthening the nonpartisan foundation for long-term civic participation.

LEAP's field program engages NCLR's existing community-based partners (see Figure 3), which operate a variety of social service programs in communities throughout the

country and include charter schools, after-school programs, job readiness and training, English-language preparation, homeownership counseling, health centers, and community activity centers. These organizations interact with Latino clients on a regular basis, offering an existing vehicle to reach new and hard-to-reach voters and to ensure that they have access to information about the voting process. NCLR works with these organizations to identify their institutional strengths and integrate nonpartisan civic participation activities such as voter registration, voter education, and "Get Out The Vote" (GOTV) into their existing programs.

**FIGURE 3.**  
LEAP Partner Organizations, 2002–2010



Community groups from across the country apply to be part of the LEAP program and receive small grants in the range of \$5,000 to \$25,000 to support their nonpartisan voter engagement campaigns (a full list of LEAP grantees from 2002–2010 can be found in Appendix B). In addition, NCLR matches the

direct grant funding with an investment in technical training and ongoing staff support, which helps build stronger organizational civic engagement infrastructure.\* LEAP partners receive an initial training session that includes dos and don'ts for nonpartisan campaigns, individualized campaign planning assistance,

\* NCLR's LEAP program was supported by an anonymous donor, the Knight Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and NCLR's own internally generated funds for the 2002–2010 period.

networking opportunities to discuss strategies that have worked for other groups, and ongoing technical assistance from NCLR. The menu of technical support available includes one-on-one check-in calls, webinars, an intranet platform and monthly conference calls for sharing materials and best practices, template campaign materials, site visits, and media assistance to draw attention to their efforts. NCLR also provides access to technology that the local organizations would not otherwise use, including tracking systems, quality control, data entry, voter files, and walk and call lists.

The on-the-ground expertise of the local organizations, combined with the tailored technical support from NCLR staff, represent

the cornerstones of the LEAP model. In LEAP's first year, it operated GOTV activities in just four states—Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, and North Carolina. In 2010, 28 partners in 17 states participated (see Table 1). With more funding available, NCLR added a voter registration component to its program in 2004, and the LEAP partner organizations have produced substantial results over time (see Table 2). To improve the partners' voter registration and GOTV output and strengthen their institutional capacity, NCLR has continuously revisited various aspects of LEAP's operations, including modifications to the training module, partner selection criteria, and type and frequency of technical assistance.

**TABLE 1. LEAP Community Partners, 2002–2010**

Election Year	Number of Community Partners	Number of Returning Partners	Number of States Represented
2002	4	N/A	4
2004	8	2	8
2006	16	5	12
2008	30	8	17
2010	22	9	13

**TABLE 2. LEAP Results, 2002–2010**

Election Year	Voter Registration Goal	Actual Voters Registered	% of Voter Registration Goal Met	GOTV Universe*
2002	Only GOTV			120,000
2004	12,500	7,425	59%	70,000
2006	15,950	8,509	53%	30,400
2008	33,491	25,247	75%	60,000
2010	21,255	19,391	91%	83,241

\* In 2008 and 2010, NCLR partners began entering GOTV information into the VAN and using Catalist—activities that more closely matched traditional campaign-style voter operations. Now that these tools are available through NCLR to its local partners, NCLR can produce 2012 GOTV universe and corresponding turnout reports that are similar to those that are generated by other campaign-style efforts.

Due to their access, credibility, cost-effective operations, and potential for long-term sustainability, NCLR Affiliates—and community-based organizations, in general—have great potential for success in their civic engagement efforts, especially considering that they serve hard-to-reach communities. In fact, resources given to these institutions can offer a higher return on investment over the long term: LEAP partners may have smaller goals when compared to large-scale voter mobilization operations, but they produce more cost-effective results, especially given the premium on culturally competent strategies, with consistent production over time.

### Access to the Community

Hispanic community organizations have a tremendous ability to reach the most disenfranchised members of the community, with clients coming through their doors on a daily basis. While many of the programs within an agency have repeat clients, new faces also arrive every day. These Latino community organizations do not run on election cycles—their doors are open nearly 365 days per year, and this consistent community presence gives them the infrastructure to reach new citizens, young people turning 18, and people who have recently moved to the community in a way that traditional four-month electoral campaigns cannot. As mentioned earlier, Obama’s “Vote for Change” program during the 2008 election recorded success using a site-based registration approach at concerts, strip malls, and grocery stores. However, this strategy misses the most disenfranchised members of the community. The **Idaho Community Action Network (ICAN)** was able to catch those in their community who would have fallen through the gaps of a traditional

campaign’s efforts by registering clients who came into their food banks (for a look at ICAN’s complete program, see Case Study 1).

In addition, many LEAP partners have strong infrastructure in hard-to-reach communities, such as rural areas and new and emerging Latino communities, where other organizations and campaigns do not. **El Pueblo, Inc.**, in Raleigh, NC, developed a relationship with the officials who oversee Raleigh’s citizenship ceremonies and were allowed to set up a voter registration table before and after the event. They have registered thousands of new citizens since they began working with NCLR in 2002, and after registration they ensure that these new Americans have information on El Pueblo’s services, including resources on elections.

Beyond the clients that they see each day, community organizations have an even deeper reach into the community via the multiplier effect of staff and clients’ families, friends, and neighbors that are touched, in some way, by the work of these service agencies. In Albuquerque, **New Mexico Community Health Votes** noted that intake staff not only registered their patients to vote, but also responded to registration requests from patients’ families, fellow staff members, and members of their own families. Likewise, these organizations are asked by educational and public institutions to collaborate on community events, further expanding their contact with the community. Staff of **Hispanic Unity of Florida, Inc.**, in Hollywood, FL registered Latino hospital workers to vote while they were already on-site making a health-related presentation, and they sponsored voter registration drives at predominantly Latino senior citizen centers that they had previously worked with on other community projects.



**CASE STUDY 1. IDAHO COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK—BOISE, ID**

ID	Campaign Results	Voter Registration	GOTV Universe
	2008	612	2,543
	2010	1,018	11,022*

\* In collaboration with nonpartisan partner, Community Council of Idaho.

The fundamental mission of the Idaho Community Action Network (ICAN) is to provide a voice for Idahoans committed to progressive social change and to develop the power necessary to create those changes. ICAN serves 2,000 members statewide and works on issues such as healthcare access, immigrant rights, utilities fairness, and food security. Prior to joining LEAP in 2008, ICAN had not previously coordinated its own organizational voter engagement campaign, and staff noted that “the direct access to national experts...was instrumental in developing our strategy to move forward on voter registration and Get-Out-The-Vote efforts.”

In their 2008 program, ICAN integrated voter registration primarily into their four food program locations—Boise, Fort Hall, Northern Idaho, and Twin Falls—as well as the organization’s various outreach activities, including citizenship ceremonies. At the beginning of the food program integration process, the number of voter registrations was not as high as anticipated, so NCLR worked with ICAN to determine how many clients visit each of the four food programs each week and how many individuals the clients feed at home with the food provided. In addition, NCLR facilitated a “best practices” conference call exchange between the program leads at the four food program locations and another NCLR community partner, Grass Roots Organizing (GRO) in St. Louis, MO, which works with a similar population. Through these conversations, ICAN began recruiting food program clients to help register their peers, using GRO training materials and a sample script to ensure that client volunteers were equipped for success. The primary ICAN LEAP coordinator continued weekly calls with the four food program site leaders as a way for them to report their voter registration numbers and brainstorm new ideas for reaching their clients.

In 2010, ICAN began its campaign by building on a strategy that emerged during their 2008 GOTV campaign—when ICAN matched their membership list to the voter file, they found that only 242 of their 2,000 members were registered to vote. Registering their membership was a key piece of their 2010 voter registration effort. In addition, ICAN invested energy in creating a voter engagement coalition composed of six different organizations that work within the Latino community. Through this coalition, the Canyon County Latino Voter Collaborative, and program integration activities, ICAN registered more voters than in 2008, and increased their volunteer base and leadership training capacity.

Throughout its two campaigns, ICAN has prioritized voter education for their clients and the broader Latino community, hosting issue and candidate forums, as well as media and communication activities. In order to improve its existing media list and become a resource on the Latino vote, NCLR drafted press advisories and releases and made press calls to media outlets with which ICAN had no previous relationship.

Both of ICAN’s 2008 and 2010 GOTV campaigns targeted the voters they had registered, as well as infrequent Hispanic voters in the traditionally underperforming Canyon County. Through relationships with Boise State University and local high schools, ICAN recruited a large number of volunteers to help with the live phone banking and canvassing pieces of their GOTV program. During the live phone calls, volunteers provided general voting information, including polling locations, and offered rides to the polls. During one weekend canvass in 2008, voters thanked the ICAN volunteers for their efforts, saying “I wouldn’t have voted without you.”<sup>18</sup>

*(case study continued)*

ICAN supplemented its field activities with automated calls and direct mailings so that each voter received a minimum of four contacts.

Through its participation in LEAP, ICAN's imprint in Idaho's civic engagement field has deepened. After the 2008 LEAP program, ICAN secured a long-term grant to operate civic engagement from 2009–2012. ICAN's LEAP program lead noted that "with the support of NCLR, ICAN was able to institutionalize its civic engagement voter work in 2008. In 2010, the support of NCLR helped strengthen our infrastructure to become a leader in voter work within the Latino community." In the future, ICAN has committed to continue leading the newly formed Canyon County Latino Voter Collaborative, help form a statewide nonpartisan voter engagement table, and prepare their own institutional infrastructure for the 2012 election campaign.


### Credibility within the Community

LEAP organizations maintain a very high level of trust with the communities they serve because of their longstanding history, permanent presence, and the quality of services they provide. Many of these organizations have operated for decades, offering information and assistance on a wide array of services from childcare to homeownership classes to citizenship assistance. The staff who work at these institutions are advocates for their clients within the context of the services they provide and offer a credible foundation from which to motivate their clients to get involved in the political process. For example, a large majority of staff at **La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)** in San Juan, TX are former farmworkers and *colonia* residents who are intimately familiar with the problems their community faces every day.

The nonpartisan nature of these institutions also adds credibility to efforts to engage the

community. When a nonpartisan institution reaches out to its clients, its priority is not "winning" or "stumping" for a particular person or party, and clients feel that they are getting less biased information than what they regularly receive in the mail or see on TV. The organization's staff can talk to its clients about the importance of voting, helping them understand how elected officials regulate the systems that impact them and their families. For example, at the **Latin American Coalition (LAC)** in Charlotte, NC, clients reported that they were more comfortable asking LAC staff questions about voter registration than they were of other people or organizations that provide the same information. Because they were already visiting LAC's office for other services, picking up voter registration forms was convenient and comfortable. Eventually, community members started calling and visiting the LAC office specifically to register to vote. Spreading information by word of mouth is not uncommon in Hispanic communities (for a look at LAC's complete program, see Case Study 2).

**CASE STUDY 2. LATIN AMERICAN COALITION—CHARLOTTE, NC**

 NC	Campaign Results	Voter Registration	GOTV Universe
	2006	376	N/A
	2008	731	3,890
	2010	836	11,510

The Latin American Coalition's (LAC) mission is to promote full Hispanic participation in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region by informing, educating, and advocating for the Latin American community. Operating since 1990, the organization serves approximately 13,000 individuals per year through its various services, including ESL classes, family support services, first-time homebuyer counseling, immigration services, short-term case management, workforce development classes, and small business development classes.

LAC has participated in LEAP during the 2006, 2008, and 2010 election cycles, each year improving its tactics and results. One of the key pieces to LAC's success has been the time and energy dedicated to building a strong civic engagement programmatic infrastructure and creating organization-wide buy-in.

Each year before the voter registration campaign kick-off, LAC discusses the program at board meetings and holds an internal launch breakfast where all staff are registered to vote, learn how to help others complete the voter registration form, and receive "Register Here" tent cards for their desks. At the kick-off event, senior management speaks about the connection civic engagement has to furthering the organization's mission. As the LEAP coordinator noted, LAC "made sure that registration was easy, convenient and available to users at minimal effort."

Both the primary and secondary LEAP coordinators actively participate in LAC's civic engagement programs and fill in for one another as needed. Because a good number of LAC's clients are not yet eligible to vote, the organization's campaign plan includes a variety of integration and coalitional strategies. Within the agency, LAC has posters in the front lobby, and to reach clients the front desk staff may have missed, caseworkers displayed signs on their desks to duplicate the request. LAC ensured that all clients who participated in their citizenship application assistance workshops received a call after the ceremony to return to the office and register to vote. Since the LAC office is very small and one-on-one contact is inevitable, the program lead easily checks in with staff daily and posts each staff member's voter registration numbers on a poster in the break room. In the 2008 campaign, the staff member with the most registrations in a single month won a gift certificate to his or her favorite local restaurant. Outside of the agency, LAC collaborated with its extensive network of community partners to set up voter registration within other nonpartisan agencies, churches, and schools. Through the relationship with the schools, LAC recruited a large base of high school student volunteers and teachers who wanted to get involved. During large community festivals, radio partners encouraged listeners to find the LAC volunteers and register to vote at these events, often broadcasting live onsite.

North Carolina's Latino community is still emerging, making canvassing a less effective tactic for sparsely populated neighborhoods. As a result, LAC's GOTV activities have focused on voter education, live phonebanking, auto calls, and direct mailings. In 2008, after receiving the LAC mailing, many Latino voters thought that LAC was their polling location. This was a learning opportunity for LAC, which realized that it needed to include polling locations on future GOTV mailings. Through partnerships with Spanish-language media partners, LAC recorded PSAs that ran on multiple radio stations, wrote a biweekly column in community

*(case study continued)*

newspapers, and discussed voting on its weekly radio program. Through a relationship with the Spanish-language newspaper, *Mi Gente*, LAC sent a voter guide to readers of the *Charlotte Observer*, which has the largest English-language newspaper circulation in Mecklenburg County.

Despite strong relationships with various Spanish-language outlets, LAC had not previously engaged much with mainstream media. With NCLR's technical support, LAC built a comprehensive press strategy, received draft advisories and releases, and discussed talking points before local events and interviews. LAC staff, through LEAP, now have a greater understanding of how to use a message and talking points during interviews, turn negative stories into positive ones, and work with the reporters to ensure that a story reflects the organization's goals. Over the years of LAC's electoral work, media outlets have come to view the organization not just as a source on Latino vote issues but also as a voice that can speak to broader community concerns.

As a result of building strong relationships with high schools during the 2010 campaign, LAC has already been asked to come back to the schools to provide training to faculty and student leaders and maintain an ongoing voter registration effort. Despite the lack of off-year funding, LAC remains committed to pursuing voter registration and turnout as part of their institutional goals each year. "Our efforts and accomplishments have enhanced the knowledge, interest, and commitment of staff and volunteers alike on the political process and the role the Hispanic community can play locally and nationally." As North Carolina's Hispanic population continues to grow and become eligible to vote, LAC has built the foundation necessary to engage them.

### Cost-Effective Operations

Integrating civic engagement into an organization's everyday operations is often a more cost-effective approach when compared to traditional campaigns, since the ongoing presence of organizations in the community prevents last-minute ramp-up and expensive overhead costs. In addition, because members of the community are already coming to their offices with questions, organizations do not have to figure out how to find the harder-to-reach populations. This point of contact is particularly important given high mobility and foreclosure rates in the Latino community. Moreover, a community organization likely already employs a large staff and interacts with thousands of clients, all of whom are trusted messengers in the Latino community and exhibit a high level of cultural competency and language skills needed to reach their peers.

In addition, LEAP partners have an existing physical infrastructure that would be advantageous for any nonpartisan voter mobilization campaign—a building (often several buildings), phones, computers, staff, and access to a volunteer base—and that prevents them from having to build a campaign office from scratch. For example, many LEAP partners already own vans and can transport volunteer canvassers to neighborhoods or people to polling locations on Election Day, without having to spend money to purchase or rent transportation. In Austin, TX, **Southwest Key Programs** used its vans to host a mobile "Early Voting Party," and gave voters rides to the polls. On Election Day, those same vans were fixed with loudspeakers and used to cruise neighborhoods, reminding people to vote.

### Long-Term Foundation for Civic Engagement

Perhaps most importantly, LEAP partners have, over time, become permanent conduits

for civic engagement information within their communities and leadership development for staff, clients, and the broader community. For example, New Mexico **Community Health Votes** noted that the front desk staff involved in its project reported that “helping clients become registered voters made them feel good about themselves.”<sup>19</sup> As front office staff, their opportunities for leadership and volunteerism in the organization’s other services had previously been limited, and the voter mobilization project helped them to personally learn more about the voting process and motivated them to get involved in other civic engagement activities in the community.

NCLR, through LEAP, works to strengthen the capacity of its Affiliates so that they are better equipped to transform their communities through consistent participation in civic life, with the ability to carve out big change over time. Through LEAP, community partners have furthered their organizational missions, and new institutional capacities and skills learned through LEAP have helped community partners succeed in other campaigns and programs. NCLR has continued to work with many of the LEAP partner organizations to engage their communities in other issues, such as healthcare and foreclosure prevention.

Through a partnership between **Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc. (CPLC)** in Phoenix, AZ, and **Hispanic Women’s Corporation (HWC)** in Phoenix, AZ, over 300 young Latinas were part of a civic engagement training, led by CPLC, at HWC’s annual Latina Leadership Conference. Although not all these young women were eligible to vote at the time of the training, they learned about the importance of getting involved in their communities, registering to vote, and voting. They also discussed ways to engage their friends and families in strengthening democracy at the local and federal levels, such as how to write a letter to members of Congress and what decisions happen at city council meetings.

## Best Practices and Overcoming Challenges

Working with service-providing agencies is not a new model in the civic engagement field, and although service-provider agencies are uniquely positioned to operate cost-effective and successful civic engagement efforts, there are also a number of obstacles to realizing that potential. No matter the organization’s size, location, or type of services offered, every organization faces financial and programmatic implications when starting a new project, and this is particularly true with organizations that have no previous experience with voter mobilization campaigns or strategy. Community organizations operate multiple sustained service programs at a time, which means that large-scale voter registration and mobilization are not their only priorities. Through in-program check-ins and post-LEAP evaluations, community partners have struggled with the following challenges, and NCLR has learned how to create technical assistance and training needs to overcome these obstacles and establish best practices.

### Organizational Commitment and Staffing Structure

Throughout its years of operation, LEAP has experienced greater success with organizations that establish a clear staffing structure and commitment from the start of the program. Partner organizations are most successful when there is knowledge of, and buy-in from, all levels of the institution—from the board of directors to executive management to program staff. Without alignment across this spectrum of institutional players, it can be difficult to maximize the integration model within the organization’s existing programs and create long-term sustainability for the civic engagement program. At **El Concilio** in Northern California, the lead civic engagement staff person changed from the 2008 to 2010 program, but an active and committed executive director helped ensure a smooth transition from one year to the next.



Most importantly, the organization's leadership must support and develop a strategic approach to the program just as with any other institutional priority. If there is no executive leadership buy-in, the project is not likely to be sustained over the long-term, especially during times when funding is scarce. Likewise, if the executive director is the only staff member committed to civic engagement, with no identified program lead to carry out the day-to-day execution, the program will struggle to meet its goals. While board members and executive directors can set priorities for the institution, each organization needs to designate an appropriate program coordinator to implement the program and maintain momentum. For example, one grantee noted that during the next election cycle, they would assign a more senior staff person to run the LEAP program. The 2010 coordinator was a new hire within the organization and was therefore not as familiar with the organizational culture or the full range of programs within the institution. In NCLR's experience, a civic engagement program lead is most successful when the person has some level of authority within the organization, (such as a senior management position) is not overwhelmed with other programmatic priorities, and has a passion for electoral empowerment.

Due to high turnover rates within the nonprofit sector, many partners are faced with staff changes in the midst of implementing their civic engagement program. Particularly during the final weeks of a GOTV campaign, turnover can be disruptive and affect the organization's success. To mitigate this issue, NCLR has required at least two people from each LEAP partner to attend the initial training session and assists them in organizing internal meetings that introduce the project to other staff within the institution. The civic engagement goals, strategy, and operations should be shared across the organization in an effort to build buy-in and ensure a transfer of knowledge to other staff. The goal of this initial meeting is to discuss how participating in elections affects their own lives as well as the lives of their

clients. If these basics are not laid out from the beginning, staff may see voter registration as an additional chore and will not see the value in incorporating this into their programs.

### Legal Expertise and Nonpartisan Permissibility

At the most basic level, community organizations often lack information—or have received misinformation—about the role that nonpartisan organizations are allowed to play in voter engagement. In NCLR's experience with its Affiliates, there is a pervasive perception that nonprofits cannot participate in voter engagement activities. In particular, they believe that they are prohibited from doing so if they receive state or federal contracts; however, as long as the organization uses separate funds designated for civic participation, voter engagement activities are allowed. In fact, nonprofits should engage in these efforts, but legal expertise is needed to dispel the myths about which nonpartisan electoral activities are allowed and what limitations exist. LEAP partners have benefitted greatly from detailed training on how to manage civic engagement finances and document the staff time that is spent on voter mobilization activities.

For example, **HELP – New Mexico (HELP – NM)**, headquartered in Albuquerque, NM, originally planned to register new voters at the front desk of its main office. However, during the program planning phase, it discovered that a federal Community Services Block Grant, one of the Albuquerque site's largest grants, restricts the agency from engaging clients in voter registration. Instead, NCLR and HELP – NM staff explored other programs where voter registration is allowed—the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Head Start—which ended up being better integration approaches than the front-desk strategy.

In addition, many community partners need information on the proper processes that affect third-party voter registration in certain states across the country. For example, for all LEAP partners in Texas, staff members and volunteers who assisted with voter registration efforts

were required to become deputized registrars with their respective County Board of Elections. In Arizona, after a ballot proposition passed in 2004, community partners needed training to collect proof of citizenship for anyone that they helped to register.

### Individualized Plans and Setting Goals

The LEAP program focuses on integrating civic engagement into existing organizational infrastructure, and since no two organizations are alike, a cookie-cutter training and program plan is not likely to produce the desired results. The size of staff, type of services offered, and needs of the communities served by each NCLR community partner varies greatly, which requires individualized plans that maximize the talents and resources of the partner organization. For example, the strategy for integrating voter registration into a housing counseling program in Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community may not work in the same type of program in Phoenix's Latino community.

**La Casa de Esperanza, Inc.** in Waukesha, WI decided to host voter registration events in the lobbies of its residential housing units, while the **MAAC Project** in Chula Vista, CA registered voters by door knocking at its residential housing units. Similarly, a community health clinic may require a different plan than a Head Start provider, even if they are serving similar demographics.

LEAP has faced challenges in the past, due to funding and capacity, and has not always started early enough in the election year with individualized planning, assessing each partner's institutional programs, and creating realistic goals that take into account the number of clients served in each program and the likely number of voters registered in each of those programs. When this process starts too late, there is not enough time to learn how to integrate voter registration, and the organization falls behind in its projected timeline. Because the integration approach is labor intensive on the front-end and often slow to show results, NCLR has learned to get an early start with LEAP partners, since spending significant time in the planning stage

is critical to success. As the staff of **Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha, Inc. (APM)**, in Philadelphia, PA noted, "This [2010] was our first year implementing civic engagement work agency-wide, so it was valuable in learning the amount of time, skill level, and dedication necessary to conduct voter registration and education so that these activities become a standard practice among all APM programs."<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, many LEAP partners designed an overall numeric goal for their civic engagement campaigns but did not break down that goal into more incremental, manageable goals for individual staff members and did not have a mechanism for how staff would report back on progress. Without an internal communication system among staff regarding the progress toward the organization's goals and an easy way to track their work, it is difficult to maintain the metrics that are comparable to other organizations or campaigns that operate in the field of voter engagement. The LEAP coordinator at **LUPE** in Texas noted, "The next time we initiate such an effort, we will devote the time required to assemble a set of operating procedures that will assure that information and data flow smoothly up and down the chain, including benchmarks to ensure that the team remains focused on the ultimate goal."<sup>21</sup> Based on these experiences, LEAP will work with groups to include this in future planning.

### Technical Knowledge and Access to Tools

Many of NCLR's partners face the challenge of having limited experience with running civic participation campaigns, with little to no access to the knowledge and resources available to traditional campaigns. As facilitators able to introduce the vocabulary, process, and tactics of a voter engagement program, NCLR provides one-on-one support to help LEAP partners navigate the technical aspects of voter mobilization campaigns. For a first-year partner, the technical support includes both the broad strokes of how to build community empowerment through

political power and an introduction to the various strategies for incorporating voter engagement into the agency. For partners that have been with the program for multiple years, NCLR works with the organizations to develop a deeper strategy wherein civic engagement becomes second nature for the institution. NCLR has discovered the following two key areas in which its nonprofit partners struggle with the technical knowledge needed to run a civic engagement program:

- **Community organizations lack exposure to voter tracking mechanisms.** A number of LEAP partners had previously registered voters or canvassed neighborhoods at some point during the life of their organizations, but they either did not know how to, or had never taken the time to, keep track of these individuals. As a result, they could not follow up with their registered clients to remind them of upcoming elections or engage them in ongoing civic participation or civic participation activities. The absence of effective tracking methods has been one barrier in the efforts of organizations to attract funding for their programs. In many cases, NCLR found that the desire and ability to adhere to strict accountability standards was not the problem, but instead it was the organizations' inability to pay for the tracking systems that would keep them competitive, such as voter file databases, GOTV tracking software, or mass communication software.\*
- **Many community organizations have limited or no experience recruiting or managing volunteers.** Because LEAP funding does not typically cover the full cost of operating a civic engagement program, the partner organizations commit a certain amount of their own financial resources and human capital,

which ultimately creates a stronger level of program ownership. While most of the LEAP program activities focus on integrating voter engagement into the existing work of the organization staff, many LEAP groups also need volunteers to help with aspects of implementation. Although the community organizations have access to a potentially large volunteer base, rounding up an engaged group of volunteers has been a challenge for many partners, primarily because many do not typically use volunteers for other institutional programs. Consequently, there are no existing systems for recruiting or training volunteers, or for managing volunteer lists.

On the other hand, LEAP organizations have tremendous access to volunteers through community outreach activities and organizational programs—such as the parents whose children are enrolled in Head Start or the high school students served through a school partnership—and should not underestimate the willingness of their clients to get involved. One important aspect of technical support in this area involves helping the organizations identify programs where a potential volunteer base could be cultivated and establish a basic system that assigns specific staff to volunteer recruitment and tracking. NCLR helped El Centro del Pueblo, in Los Angeles, CA develop a volunteer recruitment strategy that reached out to the 1,200 clients who were part of their email list server and invited Facebook friends of staff members to volunteer using event pages that listed details for each voter registration activity. In addition, staff recommended clients whom they thought would be good volunteers and distributed fliers to clients who were interested in volunteering.

\* Having the resources to pay for many of the industry standard voter file and tracking products has also been a challenge for organizations such as NCLR that serve in an intermediary role with smaller, local partner organizations. Most voter file vendors are not organized to accommodate smaller-scale models like LEAP. For example, the pricing options are per state, regardless of how many files an organization will be using in each state.

## Ongoing Funding

Civic engagement funding that is available only during major elections presents a huge challenge for community organizations that are trying to build an ongoing presence and track record in this field. Short funding cycles mean that organizations continually start programs from scratch in order to train and build staff buy-in during election years—a process that works for traditional campaigns but can be cumbersome for institutions that operate multiple programs and manage thousands of clients.

Without off-year funding, community organizations cannot continue to fully engage staff and lose momentum that has been built during the LEAP program. With ongoing funding, there is less scramble to design an integration strategy while also trying to deliver the registration and voter contact production that is in high demand during election season. LEAP partners have reported that when timelines are shortened, they resort to site-based voter registration efforts, even though the comparative advantage lies in building institutional buy-in and creating infrastructure that will survive over the long-term. When staff is not pressed for time, there is greater opportunity to develop protocols for integrating voter engagement activities into their various programs and effective messages for mobilizing their community. **Avenida Guadalupe Association** in Texas raised a small amount of money to do civic engagement work year-round through a program called **GANAS**, or **Guadalupe Association Neighborhood Ambassador Service**. To help facilitate communication between Avenida and local residents, the GANAS program identifies and recruits neighborhood leadership to assist in social and community organizations and civic engagement. As noted by Avenida's executive director, the GANAS program will continue regardless of funding; however, less funding means fewer people in the community will be reached.

## Elements of a Successful Community-Based Voter Engagement Campaign

Given these challenges, the question remains as to whether or not service providers can produce verifiable results that add value to the sometimes-crowded field of candidate, political party, PAC, and other campaigns. Over the past eight years of LEAP's existence, NCLR has found that Hispanic community organizations fill an important role in the broader field of civic engagement, particularly because they are well-positioned in the community and have internal infrastructure to implement cost-effective operations that reach the most underrepresented members of the Hispanic community. However, the challenges in recruiting, training, and providing technical assistance to start these programs within LEAP partner organizations should not be diminished; the integration process is slow and does not usually produce immediate results. The following examples look at how, with technical support and training from NCLR, Latino community organizations have maximized their organizational strengths to plan voter engagement campaigns and carry out voter registration, voter education, GOTV, and media activities.

### Building Organizational Buy-In

NCLR spends a considerable amount of time working with community organizations to establish a strong organizational program structure and civic engagement integration strategy. NCLR specifically selects LEAP partners that are committed to assessing their organizational programs in order to design an integration strategy, as opposed to creating a completely new program. As previously discussed, it is also critical to determine how the program will be structured and staffed within the institution early in the process. In particular, the potential for smoother implementation and long-term sustainability are greatly increased when the civic engagement program is



recognized at all levels—board, leadership, and staff—as an institutional priority. All levels do not necessarily have to participate in the day-to-day activities, so long as the program has a strong staff lead who can advocate for the program internally. The key is to know when and how to engage different stakeholders, depending on the size and strengths of the organization.

### Campaign Planning and Goal-Setting

At the beginning of the partnership, the community organization must analyze all points of contact that each staff person has with clients, and NCLR works with the LEAP partners to create unique and individual voter registration plans based on that contact. For example, a plan to reach parents of children enrolled in an afterschool program would be different than that for a residential facility or a health clinic. Likewise, the plan created for similar programs at separate institutions may also be different—both NCLR’s technical support offerings and the organization’s program design.

NCLR helps its partners develop campaign plans by analyzing each organization’s programs and the number of new individuals that each program serves on a weekly and monthly basis. Since not all programs serve clients who are eligible to register, or the eligible number is very small, the LEAP partners are first asked to create goals based on the programs with a large client base that have the most potential for eligible but unregistered voters. **Hispanic Unity of Florida** in Hollywood operated 20 different programs but selected the three with the most eligible voters—the front desk or intake, senior center, and the HIV/AIDS program—to be part of their voter registration project. In general, attempting to integrate voter registration into all of the programs at once is overwhelming for most LEAP partners, so identifying programs with the most potential creates a foundation for future expansion. Once the organization’s LEAP program lead selects the programs to be included in the

plan, each program receives an individual plan with specific numeric goals attached.

At **La Casa de Esperanza, Inc.** in Wisconsin, the program lead divided the organization’s programs into two categories based on a low or high percentage of eligible voters. The programs with a low percentage did not have numeric voter registration goals; instead, staff members had a goal to ask at least ten individuals per day to register to vote. The staff of programs with a larger eligible client base provided their client lists, in accordance with privacy considerations, in order to match them against the voter file. By matching the client list, the program coordinators of the Work Force Development (308 clients, 267 unregistered), Ways to Work (373 clients, 200 unregistered), and Child Care (200 clients, 119 unregistered) programs were able to strategically focus on unregistered clients, and each coordinator created a voter registration goal based on the results of the voter file match and the number of new clients that they serve each week (for a look at La Casa de Esperanza’s complete program, see Case Study 3).

During the campaign planning phase at **El Centro del Pueblo**, in Los Angeles, NCLR and El Centro concentrated on the Family Preservation program, in which staff visit client homes. Each staff member recorded estimates of the number of families they visit, the number of people over 18 living in each home, and the estimated percentage of eligible voters. This exercise allowed El Centro staff to identify the actual number of individuals the program serves overall and set a goal of registering at least 50% of the eligible individuals with whom they interacted.


NCLR staff helped the **Students Working for Equal Rights (SWER)** in Miami, FL design a drastically different plan that focused on registering one of their key constituencies, college and high school students. Since the students do not return to class until August, their campaign plan required a short but intense campaign that targeted five



campuses for both voter registration and an “I promise to vote” pledge from students who were already registered to vote. Through an analysis of each campus’s landscape, including on-campus student leadership

capacity, and a set of activities that included presentations in freshman- (for college) and senior- (for high school) dominated classes, SWER was able to register 1,050 new voters and 1,105 vote pledges.

### CASE STUDY 3. LA CASA DE ESPERANZA, INC.—WAUKESHA, WI

	Campaign Results	Voter Registration	GOTV Universe
	2006	222	N/A
	2008	510	4,367

Since 1966, La Casa de Esperanza, Inc., has been working to fulfill its mission of providing opportunities for low-income individuals to achieve full social and economic participation in society, with an emphasis on the Hispanic population. La Casa is located 30 miles west of Milwaukee and operates a variety of programs, including workforce development; early childhood educational services and youth programs; senior and disability housing; AODA treatment and HIV prevention education; and weatherization services.

Civic engagement was a natural fit for La Casa’s mission, but during the first LEAP voter engagement campaign in 2006, there was a staff transition early in the process, and the organization ran out of time to pursue a comprehensive integration strategy. The 2006 campaign focused primarily on registering voters during outreach events at food pantries, the Salvation Army, and local colleges—efforts that strained the organization’s capacity since it did not have a large existing volunteer base. In contrast, the 2008 campaign focused extensively on integration and building organizational buy-in, with an effective collaboration between an actively involved executive director and a strong civic engagement program lead. La Casa’s executive director discussed the voter engagement program at all staff meetings and sent out emails praising staff who met their goals. The program lead was a senior manager internally motivated by the subject matter and with authority in the organization who worked with NCLR to establish clear program goals and internal communication mechanisms at the program outset. By working with each of the agency’s program directors on an individual program plan, the LEAP program lead created strong staff buy-in and ownership.

To achieve a high level of integration, the LEAP lead divided the organization’s programs into two categories according to the percentage of eligible voters.

The programs with a low percentage did not have numeric voter registration goals; instead, staff members were to ask at least ten individuals per day to register to vote. The staff of programs with a high eligible client base provided their client lists, in accordance with privacy considerations, in order to match them against the voter file. By matching the client list, the program coordinators of the Workforce Development (308 clients, 267 unregistered), Ways to Work (373 clients, 200 unregistered), and Early Childhood Educational Services (200 clients, 119 unregistered) programs were able to strategically focus on unregistered clients, and each coordinator created a voter registration goal that factored in results of the voter file match and the number of new clients they serve each week. To track the progress of the integration effort, the LEAP lead visited each program coordinator on the same day each week to collect voter registration totals and completed forms; program coordinators that were not reaching

*(case study continued)*

their goals received two visits per week. These one-on-one check-ins were an opportunity to encourage staff and brainstorm new ideas. To encourage excitement around the agency, the program lead posted “Register Here” signs at each staff person’s desk, hung posters around the building, asked staff to wear “Register to Vote” t-shirts once a week, and sent an email each week with updated voter registration totals produced within each program.

La Casa was not prepared to take on a GOTV campaign in 2006 but quickly realized that without it, the voter registration effort was incomplete. In 2008, it ran a countywide GOTV campaign, targeting the individuals that it registered and infrequent Latino voters in Waukesha County. NCLR helped La Casa connect with the nonpartisan Wisconsin Civic Engagement Project to gain access to the voter file in order to create this target list. The program lead identified the two wards nearest to La Casa, which could be canvassed by volunteers, and volunteers took home call lists for the phonebank and provided the results to the program lead. La Casa also sent out multiple postcards, set up two automated calls with a message from the La Casa executive director, provided rides to the polls, and recorded PSAs that aired on local Spanish-language radio stations. Each voter received anywhere from four to seven contacts, depending on whether or not they lived close enough to the La Casa office to receive a door knock.

Since the 2008 campaign, La Casa has continued to build its volunteer base in order to help with voter registration and GOTV activities when funding is not available. In addition, the organization hosts brown-bag lunches for staff in order to discuss issues that are important to the community and strategies for continuing to register voters in their programs and engage their clients in the broader civic life of the community.

### Voter Registration

For most LEAP partners, integrating voter registration is the most time-consuming and challenging civic engagement activity, given that many groups are not well-versed in how to run a rigorous civic engagement program. However, when an organization puts in the time necessary to make an individualized plan and set specific numeric goals, significant voter registration results can be achieved. An organization must walk through the steps of assessing each of the organization’s program operations, creating small realistic goals for each program, setting up an internal process for reporting progress and tracking voters, recruiting volunteers when needed, and evaluating constantly, particularly when the programs are not meeting their goals. As Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha’s LEAP coordinator realized, “I have gained a greater appreciation for the time and dedication needed to get buy-in and integration within the agency.”<sup>22</sup>

One reality of the community-based organization model is that the integration process is slow to produce immediate results. However, if the local partners remain committed to identifying integration opportunities, small incremental gains will produce large voter registration numbers over time. In order to help determine what goals are realistic for each partner, NCLR conducts individual site visits and weekly phone check-ins to troubleshoot and discuss best practices. At a basic level, the organizations should ensure that all staff are registered and that clients have visual cues, such as posters or signs in the office waiting room or t-shirts or badges worn by the staff, that informs them of available voter registration forms. Interestingly, many LEAP partners initially thought that the majority of their staff and clients were already registered to vote or that their clients were not yet eligible. In fact, many staff or clients had never been asked, and once staff started

providing information on eligibility and asking those eligible to register, the number of registrations increased.

The **Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHisPA)** in Providence, RI, inserted a list of the voter registration eligibility requirements into the intake form, as well as a question asking the client whether or not the client fit those requirements and was registered to vote. This allowed staff to immediately give clients a voter registration form. At the Latin American Coalition, all staff take part in an internal launch breakfast meeting where they update their own voter registration forms, if necessary, and learn how to assist others in filling out the voter registration form (see Case Study 2). As demonstrated in the case studies throughout this report, the depth of integration within agency programming varies greatly and is structured to maximize the strengths of each LEAP partner.

### Voter Education and Information

NCLR community partners often serve as “one-stop shops” for services, information, or referrals in the Latino community. Their role as an information hub makes them a credible resource for information about the voting process—not just about registering, but also about where to vote, when, how, and why. During their 2010 LEAP program, the **Spanish-Speaking Citizens’ Foundation (SSCF)** carried out the important task of educating their client voters about Alameda County, California’s new “Ranked-Choice Voting System.” Many clients expressed confusion about this system, so SSCF called all of the individuals they helped become citizens over the previous year to provide information about the new system and answer questions. **CPLC** in Arizona sent a letter to each person they registered that included his/her polling place location and the CPLC office phone number in case the voter did not receive a voter registration card or had questions.

Also, most LEAP partners have existing relationships with ethnic press that provide an even larger platform to distribute voting information to the community. Staff of CHisPA

in Rhode Island serve as hosts for a weekly Spanish-language radio program that reaches 25,000 listeners. Through this program, they reminded people of the voter registration deadline, encouraged them to come to the CHisPA office to register to vote, provided details about polling ID requirements, encouraged voters to take advantage of early voting, and reminded the community of Election Day polling hours. In addition, LEAP partners have hosted nonpartisan candidate debates and meet-and-greet events so that their clients can learn more about elected officials’ positions on issues of importance to the community, and several LEAP organizations serve as polling locations within their county.

### GOTV

While community organizations are uniquely well-positioned for voter registration and education activities, GOTV operations pose some challenges. Although organizations benefit because clients already come directly to them to register to vote, they are less familiar with the short but intense structure of a canvassing operation. Many mobilization techniques—such as identifying which GOTV strategies are most effective, how to create a target list, how many contacts are needed per voter, how many volunteers are needed to reach the GOTV universe, and how to track voter responses—are new to LEAP partners. On the other hand, organizations can add tremendous value to the GOTV landscape because the wealth of existing physical infrastructure, including buildings, phones, computers, Internet services, and office supplies, saves a great deal of time and money when setting up a GOTV operation. In addition, organizations have access to staff and client volunteers that, through more intense outreach, could be helpful assets to both phonebanking and canvassing activities.

The LEAP partners’ GOTV plans have been as diverse as their voter registration plans and reflect each organization’s staff, volunteer capacity, and access to resources. The partners typically focus their mobilization efforts on

the individuals that they registered to vote, but many add to that universe by targeting infrequent Hispanic voters and those with no existing voter history. NCLR, either through partnerships with other civic engagement networks or through its own access to voter file tools, helps LEAP partners identify those infrequent voters and, when capacity allows, design a plan with a range of four to seven contacts that includes a combination of phonebanking and automatic calls, mailers, and door canvassing. NCLR designs and distributes template phonebanking and door canvassing scripts, as well as collateral materials such as door hangers and mail pieces that partners can use during their GOTV operations. Multiyear LEAP partners have been trained to use the voter file in order to create their own GOTV plans, though most organizations require significant technical assistance before feeling comfortable with this technology. For organizations that are not able to use the voter file tools on their own, NCLR assists by navigating the voter files to create walk and phone lists for the partners.

**Congreso de Latinos Unidos**, based in Philadelphia, matched its organization's archived client list to the voter file in order to separate the registered from unregistered clients. The registered client list was then matched to Congreso's active client list in order to determine which staff member worked with those individuals. Those staff members were then responsible for making a GOTV call to those clients, and active clients that were not connected to staff were distributed among staff with smaller registered voter client lists. Congreso organized four nights of phone banking, during the final days leading up to Election Day, where staff used their cell phones to call clients. Congreso also sent a mailer to all its registered clients and coordinated an election protection call center, in partnership with the *ya es hora ¡Ve Y Vota!* campaign at one of the office locations on Election Day.

The MAAC Project in California focused its energy on individuals who they had helped

register during the voter registration phase, as well as the residents living in its affordable housing properties. Volunteers from MAAC's charter school called each voter on the registration list twice, and the MAAC staff property managers used a combination of phonebanking, distributing flyers, and doorknocking to reach the residents.

### Media and Visibility

With so many Latino voters new to the process, media and visibility activities are critical elements of any LEAP partner campaign. Getting the word out over the airwaves, and having a community organization to provide information locally creates an environment conducive to increased voter participation. NCLR helps generate media attention for its LEAP partners in order to elevate the profile of the community organization in more mainstream press outlets and increase awareness within the Latino community about local resources to help with the voting process. As with voter registration and GOTV planning, individualized media planning that takes into account an organization's existing media relationships and the capacity of staff to engage the press is critical. Many LEAP partners generate earned media by inviting media to attend community events where voter registration activities take place and sending short press releases with updates on their voter registration totals. NCLR provides LEAP partners with technical assistance on how to create press interest and how and when to follow up with media contacts. In addition, NCLR hosts an intranet site where LEAP partners can login to access template press advisories, press releases, and visibility collaterals.


At El Concilio in Stockton, CA, working with local media, particularly the Spanish-language outlets, was not new. However, through the LEAP program, the organization developed new relationships with mainstream outlets, including the *Modesto Bee*. During technical support calls with NCLR, El Concilio staff planned a voter engagement campaign



launch event and generated potential “feel good” angles that they could pitch to press, such as Latinos from different generations both registering and voting for the first time. After an initial face-to-face conversation with several beat reporters, the *Bee* ran a story on El Concilio’s voter outreach efforts, with additional coverage from Telemundo.

El Concilio worked throughout their voter engagement campaign to maintain these media relationships, and as Election Day neared, various press outlets contacted them to give statements on Hispanic vote issues (for a look at El Concilio’s full program, see Case Study 4).

#### CASE STUDY 4. EL CONCILIO—STOCKTON, CA

	Campaign Results	Voter Registration	GOTV Universe
	2008	1,165	6,799
	2010	1,432	3,686

El Concilio (Council for the Spanish-Speaking) has been serving Latinos throughout San Joaquin and Stanislaus Counties for the past 43 years. The agency is one of the largest organizations participating in LEAP, operating multiple satellite offices in Northern California and reaching tens of thousands of individuals each year. El Concilio had a very successful organizational structure from the start of their involvement in LEAP, with the executive director laying out the rationale for a civic engagement program and the importance of voting at an all-staff kick-off meeting. The executive director selected two program leads to spearhead the civic engagement program, and introduced them at the meeting. Even with this solid infrastructure, integration was more time-consuming and producing fewer results than the program leads had initially thought. They began looking for community events to register voters and thought of abandoning the integration approach. Through phone calls and site visits from NCLR, El Concilio was able to assess why the programs were not posting numbers and develop a more effective campaign plan.

El Concilio staff reported to the program leads that when they asked clients to register, their response was that they were already registered or not eligible. This is not uncommon within organizations that are doing this work for the first time, and NCLR helped El Concilio analyze the programs and their client reach. At the next all-staff meeting opportunity, the program managers presented a plan for integration, and the executive director challenged each staff person to register at least seven people, a small goal that when combined would result in El Concilio reaching its overall voter registration goal. Each staff member was held personally accountable for some part of the civic engagement program, with a goal that sounded reasonable and encouraged broader ownership of the project. After the staff meeting, the program leads visited all of the organization’s locations to observe their integration approach and remind them of the executive director’s challenge. They distributed badges that said “Ask me about registering to vote” and hung posters in every waiting area. The executive director remained involved, sending emails that the program leads drafted to publicly acknowledge staff who were meeting their goals and rewarding them with a gift certificate. In addition, the executive director personally met with staff who were struggling and would ask them to participate in outreach activities or register friends and family in order to meet their goals. Within three months, El Concilio averaged over 100 voter registrations per week, and most staff ended up registering more than the target number of seven voters.



*(case study continued)*

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Voter registration continued in the agency in 2010, again with great results. Because of a short gap between the two efforts, the program lead needed to revisit the importance of voter registration with staff. “At the beginning, staff had the idea that since this was done two years ago, we had registered everyone,” the 2010 program lead reported. In order to motivate staff, El Concilio returned to tactics that had produced results in 2008, including ongoing trainings, one-on-one visits from the executive director, email blasts, and contests. The office that registered the most voters received a lunchtime pizza party, and the individual who collected the most voter registrations got to join the El Concilio delegation to travel to Washington, DC in March 2011 for NCLR’s National Latino Advocacy Days event. In addition, El Concilio invested more time on voter education in the 2010 campaign, hosting an issue forum that all local candidates attended and a voter information event to discuss and help people understand the language of the extensive list of ballot propositions. Each satellite office distributed bilingual voter guides, and all front desk staff were trained on how to use the county registrar’s website to look up polling place locations.

El Concilio’s GOTV efforts included the traditional elements of phonebanking, canvassing, and direct mail for a range of one to four contacts per voter. The organization targeted the individuals that it had registered to vote and added a list of infrequent Latino voters in San Joaquin County. Similar to other LEAP partners, El Concilio focused door canvassing efforts on the precincts near the main office. The program leads identified several precincts close to the main office that could be canvassed and sent out multiple mailings to its targeted universe.

As a result of their participation in LEAP, El Concilio has become one of the strongest voices for Hispanics in Northern California and one of NCLR’s most active advocacy partners, joining voices throughout the country who weighed in during the 2010 debate about health care reform legislation. El Concilio provided education on the issue at agency sites, and 2,861 clients and community members called members of Congress in support of health care reform. The organization also collected 3,677 postcards, collected detailed personal stories from clients on health struggles, and hosted a community town hall on the issue. Health care is just one issue of importance to the community that El Concilio serves, and the campaign skills learned through LEAP will continue to serve the organization well in future efforts.

## Recommendations

Achieving Latino electoral participation commensurate with this community’s share of the population requires a multilayered set of strategies. While traditional political and partisan campaigns can and should increase meaningful and energetic outreach to Latino voters—something that will attract more Latino voters to the polls—this alone will not close the participation gaps. The three richest sources for Latino electoral expansion lie largely outside the scope of political and partisan campaign strategies: Latinos eligible to become citizens, citizens turning 18, and

those already of voting age but detached from the electoral process. By definition, traditional political and partisan campaigns rarely target these non- or infrequent voters. By contrast, these voter pools are increasingly the targets of emerging nonpartisan efforts and those of community organizations, which represent or reach these populations in their daily operations.

LEAP’s approach has focused on working with its affiliated community-based Latino service-providers, pursuing electoral expansion through direct growth in Latino voter participation as well as in greater

involvement by community organizations in the civic life of their communities. With existing infrastructure and cultural expertise in the communities they serve, organizations can connect with the hardest-to-reach individuals and bring new voters into the process, helping them develop habitual voting patterns that subsequently put them on the radar of traditional campaigns.

This report demonstrates that with adequate training and support, community organizations can leverage their access to and credibility with the community, their established operational footprint, and their long-term presence to make significant contributions to the civic engagement of underrepresented Hispanic communities. Housed within multi-issue, multi-service agencies, civic engagement can go beyond generating voter registrations and turnout during a time-limited campaign by providing an opening to engage community members in other activities and issues. As evidenced by the stories of LEAP partners in this report, this model has tremendous potential to fill the gaps that currently exist in the traditional candidate and party campaign paradigm, and even in some broader electorally focused efforts to achieve electoral expansion.

By nature, these organizations are not likely to produce large numbers on a short timeline, but they can produce more substantial outcomes over a longer period of time once voter engagement becomes second nature within the institution. Additionally, as an organization learns what it takes to operate and integrate an accountable voter engagement program, some of the same mechanisms that the organizations use for voter registration can be leveraged to advance other efforts, such as assisting eligible immigrants to become citizens—thus strengthening the participation continuum linking eligible immigrants to citizenship, citizens to voting, and the community at large to civic action.

For service providers to maximize their role in expanding the Hispanic electorate, NCLR

has several recommendations for taking this model to greater scale:

- **Training and technical assistance is essential.** Most organizations need several election cycles to learn civic engagement vocabulary, skills, and tactics, and have limited experience in running voter registration and mobilization campaigns. Many would not consider doing this type of work alone. NCLR has asked its Affiliate Network to educate community organizations about what it takes to do this work and to recruit partners. NCLR's LEAP partners have achieved success by receiving both subgrant funding from NCLR to implement their program and in-depth technical support regarding assessment of their programs and opportunities for integration, campaign planning, strategy, and data management. With individualized technical assistance throughout the course of a campaign, organizations can more effectively institutionalize civic engagement with the goal of reducing the amount of necessary technical support over time.
- **Community organizations need greater access and exposure to voter tracking technology.** The use of VAN, Catalist, and other technology tools can increase the effectiveness of voter mobilization programs, their ability to measure success, and their ability to attract funding. However, having the resources to pay for many of the industry-standard voter file and tracking products has been a challenge for organizations like NCLR that serve in an intermediary role, and even more so for local organizations that have small-volume registration and mobilization programs. Most voter file vendors are not organized to accommodate smaller-scale models like NCLR's LEAP program; for example, the pricing options are per state, regardless of how many files an organization will be using in each state. In addition to access to tracking systems that would keep them competitive, local organizations need more

training and technical support to navigate the use of this technology.

- **Funding support to build and integrate a civic engagement program is needed.**

Traditional civic engagement funding streams tend to provide resources only during major election years, in battleground states, and to larger-scale operations—an approach that will not close the gaps in Latino voter participation. The LEAP model, and other potential “year-round” approaches, can help fill this gap. However, for organizations to leverage their existing presence and infrastructure, they need ongoing funding—small but consistent financial investments that support greater integration of civic engagement activity within their institutions. Such funding can help them become readily identifiable voter registration sites for their clients and community, where a new citizen or 18-year-old can go to register at any time of the year—reducing reliance on the episodic nature of campaign seasons to try and reach these potential voters.

- **Coordination is necessary to achieve economies of scale.** With participating community organizations running relatively small-scale voter engagement projects, the involvement of a central partner that can manage access to voter tools and broader

partnerships is often necessary. The central entity can negotiate more cost-effective access to technology and voter engagement tools (such as voter files, tracking systems, and quality control), as well as specialized technical assistance and legal counsel, while providing a platform for sharing best practices and replicating innovative strategies across communities. Similarly, particularly as organizations start to build their programs, NCLR has found that some may be less inclined to participate in local or state voter tables—either because these tables do not offer the direct assistance that the organization may need, or the organization’s project may be too small to warrant the time investment. Thus in the past NCLR has often represented LEAP participants in various tables as appropriate, to allow available staff time within those organizations to be dedicated to running and integrating the project.

The LEAP program experience demonstrates that the community-based organization model can produce significant incremental gains in the Latino electorate in an extremely cost-effective manner. Donors interested in supporting the growth of the Hispanic electorate should thus consider this community-based organization model as one of several strategies required to achieve this goal.

## Appendix A

### NCLR Publications

- *Engaging the Latino Electorate*, March 2011, [www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/engaging\\_the\\_latino\\_electorate](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/engaging_the_latino_electorate)
- “Latino Participation in Midterm Elections: A Quick Glance,” presentation, October 2010, [www.nclr.org/images/uploads/pages/PPT-Latino%20Vote%20Midterms2010.pdf](http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/pages/PPT-Latino%20Vote%20Midterms2010.pdf)
- *Latino Voters in the 2010 Election: Numbers, Parties, and Issues*, October 2010, [www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/latino\\_voters\\_in\\_the\\_2010\\_election\\_numbers\\_parties\\_and\\_issues](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/latino_voters_in_the_2010_election_numbers_parties_and_issues)
- *Catalysts and Barriers to Attaining Citizenship: An Analysis of ya es hora ¡CIUDADANIA!*, September 2010, [www.nclr.org/images/uploads/publications/Naturalization\\_YaEsHora\\_Cuidadania\\_2010.pdf](http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/publications/Naturalization_YaEsHora_Cuidadania_2010.pdf)
- *The Latino Electorate: Profile and Trends*, July 2007, [www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/the\\_latino\\_electorate\\_profiles\\_and\\_trends](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/the_latino_electorate_profiles_and_trends)
- “How Did Latinos Really Vote in 2004?” November 2004, [www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/how\\_did\\_latinos\\_really\\_vote\\_in\\_2004](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/how_did_latinos_really_vote_in_2004)
- *Mobilizing the Vote: Latinos and Immigrants in the 2002 Midterm Election*, November 2002, [www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/mobilizing\\_the\\_vote\\_latinos\\_and\\_immigrants\\_in\\_the\\_2002\\_midterm\\_election](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/mobilizing_the_vote_latinos_and_immigrants_in_the_2002_midterm_election)
- *Mobilizing the Latino Vote: Tapping the Power of the Hispanic Electorate*, July 2002, [www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/mobilizing\\_the\\_latino\\_vote\\_tapping\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_the\\_hispanic\\_electorate](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/mobilizing_the_latino_vote_tapping_the_power_of_the_hispanic_electorate)

### Other Polling and Research Resources

- Latino Decisions, “A Primer on Latino Polling Methodology,” April 27, 2011, [latinodecisions.wordpress.com/2011/04/27/a-primer-on-latino-polling-methodology](http://latinodecisions.wordpress.com/2011/04/27/a-primer-on-latino-polling-methodology)
- Latino Decisions, “Election Eve Poll: 2010 Midterm Elections,” November 2010, [latinodecisions.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/press-briefing-pptx.pdf](http://latinodecisions.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/press-briefing-pptx.pdf)
- NALEO Educational Fund, *General Election Profile, Latinos in Congress and State Legislatures After Election 2008: A State-By-State Summary*, November 2008, [www.naleo.org/08PostElec-Profile.pdf](http://www.naleo.org/08PostElec-Profile.pdf)
- NALEO Educational Fund, “2008 Latino Vote Survey in Key Battleground States,” November 2008, [www.naleo.org/downloads/2008NALEO\\_Latino\\_Voter\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.naleo.org/downloads/2008NALEO_Latino_Voter_Survey.pdf)
- Latino National Survey research project, 2006, [depts.washington.edu/uwiser/LNS.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/uwiser/LNS.shtml)

## Appendix B

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### 2002 LEAP Partner Organizations

- Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc. (CPLC)—Phoenix, AZ
- El Pueblo, Inc.—Raleigh, NC
- Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA)—Denver, CO
- Latino Vote Iowa—Des Moines, IA

### 2004 LEAP Partner Organizations

- Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc. (CPLC)—Phoenix, AZ
- Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Inc.—Philadelphia, PA
- Del Norte Neighborhood Development Corporation—Denver, CO
- El Centro, Inc.—Kansas City, KS
- El Pueblo, Inc.—Raleigh, NC
- Latino Arts, Inc./United Community Center—Milwaukee, WI
- Latino Educational and Recreational Network (L.E.a.R.N.)—Salem, OR
- Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRCC)—Nashville, TN

### 2006 LEAP Partner Organizations

- Center for Training and Careers, Inc. (CTC)—San Jose, CA
- Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc. (CPLC)—Phoenix, AZ
- Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Inc.—Philadelphia, PA
- El Centro, Inc.—Kansas City, KS
- El Comité de Longmont—Longmont, CO
- El Pueblo, Inc.—Raleigh, NC
- Hispanic Coalition—Miami, FL
- International Institute/LACASA—East Chicago, IN
- La Casa de Esperanza, Inc.—Waukesha, WI
- La Causa, Inc.—Milwaukee, WI

- Latin American Coalition—Charlotte, NC
- Latina Initiative—Denver, CO
- Latino Leadership—Orlando, FL
- NAF Multicultural Human Development Corp.—Omaha, NE
- Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC)—Nashville, TN
- Youth Development, Inc. (YDI)—Albuquerque, NM

### 2008 LEAP Partner Organizations

- Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy (CHISPA)—Providence, RI
- Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)—Washington, DC
- Centro Campesino Farmworker Center, Inc.—Homestead, FL
- Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc. (CPLC)—Phoenix, AZ
- Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Inc.—Philadelphia, PA
- El Centro del Pueblo—Los Angeles, CA
- El Concilio—Stockton, CA
- El Pueblo, Inc.—Raleigh, NC
- HELP—New Mexico—Albuquerque, NM
- Hispanic Unity of Florida—Hollywood, FL
- Hispanic Women's Corporation—Phoenix, AZ
- Hyde Square Task Force—Boston, MA
- Idaho Community Action Network (ICAN)—Boise, ID
- La Casa de Esperanza, Inc.—Waukesha, WI
- Latin American Coalition—Charlotte, NC
- Latina Initiative—Denver, CO
- Latino Leadership—Orlando, FL
- MAAC Project—Chula Vista, CA
- Make the Road New York—Jackson Heights, NY



- Nevada Hispanic Services, Inc.—Reno, NV
- New Mexico Community Health Votes (NMCHV)—Albuquerque, NM
- San Juan Citizens Alliance/Los Compañeros—Durango, CO
- Southwest Key Programs—Austin, TX
- Spanish-Speaking Citizens' Foundation (SSCF)—Oakland, CA
- Students Working for Equal Rights (SWER), a project of the Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC)—Miami, FL
- Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC)—Nashville, TN
- The Resurrection Project—Chicago, IL
- Southwest Key Programs—Austin, TX
- Spanish-Speaking Citizens' Foundation (SSCF)—Oakland, CA
- Tejano Center for Community Concerns—Houston, TX

### 2010 LEAP Partner Organizations

- AltaMed Health Services Corporation—Los Angeles, CA
- Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha, Inc. (APM)—Philadelphia, PA
- Avenida Guadalupe Association—San Antonio, TX
- CASA de Maryland, Inc.—Hyattsville, MD
- Casa Guadalupe Center—Allentown, PA
- CAUSA—Salem, OR
- Centro de Orientacion del Inmigrante (CODI)—Miami, FL
- Community Council of Idaho—Caldwell, ID
- Comunidades Unidas—Salt Lake City, UT
- East Boston Ecumenical Community Council (EBECC)—East Boston, MA
- El Centro del Pueblo—Los Angeles, CA
- El Concilio—Stockton, CA
- El Pueblo, Inc.—Raleigh, NC
- Idaho Community Action Network (ICAN)—Boise, ID
- Latin American Coalition—Charlotte, NC
- Latina Initiative—Denver, CO
- La Unión del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)—San Juan, TX
- Make the Road New York—Jackson Heights, NY

## Endnotes

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