

Strategically Enhancing Business Capabilities And Social Development In The Hispanic Community

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ABSTRACT

Hurricane Katrina displaced more than one million people while destroying or badly disrupting more than 40% of Louisiana's economic base. Thousands of small businesses ceased to exist. The socio-economic damage in the U.S. appears without precedent. The growing Hispanic population in southeast Louisiana presents a unique and distinctive socio-economic challenge. As Hispanics move into the region in large numbers seeking economic opportunities, specific needs are emerging. A variety of work and social skills must be developed and nurtured. Business skills and guidance must be offered. These needs must be recognized and addressed to facilitate a holistic assimilation of a growing Hispanic population into southeast Louisiana and develop a strong and literate workforce. The Hispanic Business Resources & Technology Center (HBRTC) was created by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana (HCCL) in alliance with The Hispanic Apostolate Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, The Jefferson Parish School System, and Southeastern Louisiana University, to address the post-Katrina crisis in the New Orleans region and to address needs of Hispanic families and businesses. The HBRTC is the first of its kind in the State of Louisiana to specifically address the myriad needs of the developing Hispanic workforce and community in Louisiana.

Keywords: Hispanic business, Hispanic enterprises, Hispanic community

INTRODUCTION

Hispanics are the country's largest and fastest growing minority, but they are not an easily identified racial or ethnic group (Pew Hispanic Center, Trends 2005). The 2000 Census report describes the Hispanic population as a group with special characteristics and profiles, such as age, educational achievement, earnings, geographic distribution, etc. In 2000, the U.S. Census reported 32.8 million Hispanic or Latinos in the United States, representing 12% of the total population. By 2004, the Hispanic population had grown to over 40 million, an increase of more than 23%. The largest increase in the Hispanic population is occurring in the southern United States (Pew Hispanic Center). Hispanic labor will expand to nearly 10 million by 2020 (Pew Hispanic Center). As an example of the significant presence of Hispanics in the South, a recent news report on CNN (September 2, 2007) reported that 60% of Houston's school children are Hispanic. The impacts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the South, and its population are significant.

Katrina did the unimaginable. It displaced more than one million people, killed more than 1,500 and destroyed or badly disrupted more than 40% of Louisiana's economic base. The socio-economic damage is without precedent. In addition, the demographic makeup of the region is changing due to the significant growth of the Hispanic population. The needs of the Hispanic population in southeast Louisiana present a unique and distinctive socio-economic challenge.

The challenge is clear, the needs many. A variety of work and social skills must be developed and nurtured. Language training must be provided. Business skills and guidance must be offered. Mentoring, education, and leadership opportunities must be provided. These and other needs must be addressed to facilitate the assimilation of the Hispanic population into southeast Louisiana and to build a strong and literate workforce (Baraya and Sikaffy, 2006).

Brenda Muniz (2006) reports that “The Latino population in the states affected by Katrina -Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana – increased by 207.9%, 148.4%, and 15.8% respectively, between 1990 and 2000”. The Honduran Consulate estimated that up to 140,000 Hondurans and their descendants lived in and around New Orleans, representing the largest Latino subgroup in that area and the largest Honduran population outside Honduras (Muniz, 2006).

Penny Brown, June (2007) reported that no one knows for certain how many Hispanics have moved into the area. U.S. Census estimates and Louisiana Public Health Institute survey are expected to lend some insight later this year. But even those numbers may not offer a true picture. Before hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast region, the Pew Institute for Hispanic studies, estimated Louisiana had up to 45,000 undocumented workers (Pew Hispanic Center, 2006). Plenty of evidence suggests the Latino population is booming (Brown, 2007).

Martin Gutierrez, director of the Hispanic Apostolate of the Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans, said that while it is hard to determine the precise size of the Latino community, the Hispanic population has likely more than doubled in the 22 months since migrant workers began arriving from Central and South America to assist in the recovery (2007). Census figures put the New Orleans metro region’s Hispanic population at roughly 60,000 pre-Hurricane Katrina, and Gutierrez believes at least 20,000 were uncounted in the Census. Today, Gutierrez estimates up to 150,000 Latinos live in the New Orleans area. Before Katrina, much of the metro area’s Hispanic population was concentrated in Jefferson Parish. Now, the Hispanic presence is widespread.

The HBRTC, a creation of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana in alliance with the Hispanic Apostolate Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, the Jefferson Parish School System, and Southeastern Louisiana University seeks to serve the needs of this growing population segment. The U. S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USHCC) and the AT&T Foundation provided seed monies to develop the concept of a business incubator geared to the needs of the region.

Before Hurricane Katrina, the USHCC Foundation had conceived its Casa Cyber concept: developing a nationwide system of business incubators and technology centers for Hispanics. Given the post-Katrina situation in the New Orleans region, the concept here has evolved into a holistic approach of providing fuller business assistance, educational opportunities, and social services to the affected Hispanic community. Being the first of its kind, and the first of the USHCC Foundation-Casa Cyber Network, the program has the potential to become a model for service providers of many minority communities. The Hispanic Business Resources & Technology Center represents a frank approach to addressing ethnic cultural sensitivity and language barriers.

COORDINATION OF SERVICES AND RESOURCES

The HBRTC, located in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana (outside of New Orleans) opened in March 2006. It offers services through its affiliated partners that address identified and developing needs of the Hispanic community. Specific participation in the Center includes the following efforts and support activities.

- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans - Hispanic Apostolate (CCANO-HA) provides social service representatives on site to assist individuals with the following services: job placement, educational programs, emergency assistance, immigration services, trauma counseling, workers’ rights workshops and medical assistance through the Latino Health Access Network. In addition, the Hispanic Apostolate provides citizenship classes.
- The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana (HCCL) provides administrative support for the Center, offers workshops relating to business start-up and business mentoring, youth mentoring, and conducts

business surveys related to post-Katrina Hispanic business needs. It provides networking opportunities for those seeking broader exposure and business development opportunities in the region. In addition, it provides a unified voice for the Hispanic business community in seeking government and private cooperation that advances the cause of Hispanic businesses and families.

- The Jefferson Parish School System's (JPSS's) ongoing commitment to provide 4,800 square feet of office, classroom and lab space at Theodore Roosevelt Middle School in Kenner, Louisiana to serve as the home of the HBRTC has been pivotal to the program's success. That building which sits in an area with a large Hispanic population, houses two computer labs, a business conference room for workshops, a social service room, and ESL and Citizenship classrooms. There are also offices for administrators and private counseling rooms. In addition, the Jefferson Parish's School System's Adult Education program provides internet connections and English as a Second Language courses to the target population.
- Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU) provides instructors for business development workshops and seminars. The University provides grant writing assistance and research support as well as research relating to the migration of the Hispanic population in Louisiana. In addition, Southeastern Louisiana University provides management oversight of the operations of the HBRTC as well as administrative support of the Center.

SUSTAINABILITY

Support from the four founding partners HCCL, CCANO-HA, JPSS, SLU, and sponsors including Toyota , the USHCC Foundation, National Council of La Raza, Entergy, Cox Communications, Bellsouth Real Yellow Pages, Inter American Development Bank, Prudential Foundation, Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market, Verizon Wireless, New Beginnings, LLC and collaborations with Tulane University, University of New Orleans, Louisiana Small Business Development Center, Louisiana International Trade Center, American Red Cross, State Farm Insurance, St. Charles Community Health Care Center,

FEMA and SBA, Mauricio Trujillo Constructions, helps sustain the HBRTC and its ability to provide resources to the Hispanic community.

The HBRTC is the first of its kind in Louisiana and is open to the Hispanic community. It is particularly convenient for those residing and conducting business in the greater New Orleans region, including the parishes of Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, and St. Charles.

The four founding partners have dedicated staff and resources to the Center to develop business and social services programs that target the needs of the Hispanic community. The programs are bilingual in format and culturally sensitive.

HISPANIC BUSINESS RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY CENTER PROGRAMS

The following programs and activities have been conducted and continue to be offered by the HBRTC:

- **Adult Education Program:**
 1. English as a Second Language Classes (morning and evenings)
 2. Computer Classes
 3. Spanish Classes
- **Business Development Workshops and Counseling:**
 1. How to Create Your Own Business
 2. Marketing Your Business
 3. Human Resource Management
 4. One-on-One Business Counseling
 5. Micro-Enterprise Development Initiative Program
- **Personal Counseling and Seminars:**
 1. Know Your Rights for Employees
 2. Trauma Counseling
 3. Domestic Violence Workshops
 4. Health Promoters
 5. Mexican Consulate Mobile Offices
- **Disaster Relief Services:**
 1. SBA Hub Zone Certification Training
 2. SBA AA and SBB Certification Training
 3. FEMA Preparedness Training
 4. Cultural Awareness Sessions

Lastly, the HBRTC was not established for publicity purposes but rather to serve the needs of a growing and distinct population. However, for its efforts, the four founding partners were awarded the US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation President’s Award for establishing a capacity building institution and leadership for Hispanic businesses after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina (April 2006). In addition, HBRTC has been featured in local, regional and national media, such as Kenner TV 76, EFE America Television, Univision-Primer Impacto, WWL-TV, WGNO, ABC-TV, The Advocate in Baton Rouge, EL TIEMPO, HBO, Times Picayune, City Business of New Orleans, Southeastern Louisiana University Television, De Todo Un Poco and Hablemos Claro with Cox Communications and La Tropical 1540 Radio Station.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS

In the beginning, the HBRTC estimated the number of participants who would utilize its various programs. In addition to those estimates, the table below provides reported participation data since the Center’s opening in March of 2006.

**Hispanic Business Resources and Technology Center
(Kenner location)**

Activity/Category	Expected Number of users every 2 years	Enrollment since opening 3/13/06
Computer technology training	50	Will begin in October 2007
Business startup seminars, workshops and counseling, micro-enterprise workshops	500	320
Assistance in accessing disaster relief	300	150
English as a Second Language (ESL)	500	410
Social Services: Basic health services, health promoters, trauma counseling, domestic violence workshops, citizenship classes, tutoring K-12, consulate services	500	1600
Job placement and workforce development	500	80
Mentoring and educational programs for Hispanic students with JPPS	200	Will begin October 2007
Others: Spanish classes for non-Spanish speaking	100	50
Total:	2,650	2,610

The Hispanic Business Resources and Technology Center is expected to positively impact the local and regional community by providing resources to help the Hispanic community recover from Hurricane Katrina and provide direction and guidance for Hispanic migration to the Region. It will also provide for the assimilation needs of new Hispanic workers, as they potentially become new residents and contributors to the region’s economy. Because any entity providing services in the New Orleans area would need to consider family as well as business needs, the philosophical approach of the Hispanic Business Resources and Technology Center is holistic in nature, requiring equal components of business and educational development, technological training and social services.

As the HBRTC continues to serve the needs of the Hispanic community in the New Orleans area, discussions are underway to establish satellite service centers around the state. Louisiana’s Hispanic population is growing throughout the state, and services as provided by the HBRTC, are indeed, needed in other parts of the state.

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