

City of Petaluma, California

Latinx Community Engagement and Spanish Communication Project

Midpoint Report

Introduction and context

Who is a Latino/Latina/Latinx or Hispanic?

In its latest definition, the U.S. Census Bureau understands that there are two minimum categories for ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. It considers race and Hispanic origin to be two separate and distinct concepts and thus Hispanics and Latinos may be of any race. “Latino/Latina/Latinx or Hispanic” It's a broad term that includes people from Latin America and Spanish-speaking countries or cultures, as well as those who trace their heritage to Mexico; it covers both recent undocumented immigrants and U.S. citizens whose families have been here for generations. The more modern term “Latinx” also refers to a person of Latin American origin or descent and it is used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina.

Who makes up the Latinx Community in Petaluma?

According to the latest U.S. Census figures, roughly 13,300 Latino/Hispanic people live in Petaluma, making up a little less than a quarter (21.9%) of the total population. Petaluma's Latinx population grew significantly in the four decades spanning from 1970-2010, counting only 639 people or 2.6% of the total population in the 1970 Census (at the time aggregated under the heading “Persons of Spanish Origin or Descent”) to 12,453 residents and 21.5% of the total population in the 2010 Census. This population growth has plateaued in the last 10 years. Census data from 2010-2019 shows that Petaluma's Latinx historically largest sub-community, those coming or descending from Mexico, has seen a decline in its population with around 1,700 leaving Petaluma for another location. This drop in numbers was compensated by the arrival of 2,000 residents from other Latin American countries. The current demographics tell us that people from Mexico still account for 70% of the Latinx Community of Petaluma, down from 83% of just ten years ago.

Why Spanish-language communication?

Spanish is by far the second language of choice in Petaluma, accounting to close to 75% of the total population (approx. 13,400 people) that speak a language other than English. The latest data show that 17% of Petaluma's residents over 5 years old (around 9,800 people) speak Spanish. A little over half of these people (5,400) also report that they preferably speak English or speak English very well. The other slightly less than half (4,300 residents) report they speak English less than very well. In summary, it can be said that approximately half of the Latinx population is bilingual and the other half is closer to what is defined as monolingual Spanish. In household terms, 13% of Petaluma's households (3,136) speak Spanish at home and the large majority of these (90%) also report that English is also spoken at home. Worth noting is that there are sub-groups of the Latinx community that speak an indigenous language and Spanish (for example the Oaxacan people of Southern Mexico speak *triqui* as their mother tongue and have a small presence in Petaluma).

What is the City of Petaluma currently doing to engage and communicate with the Latinx Community?

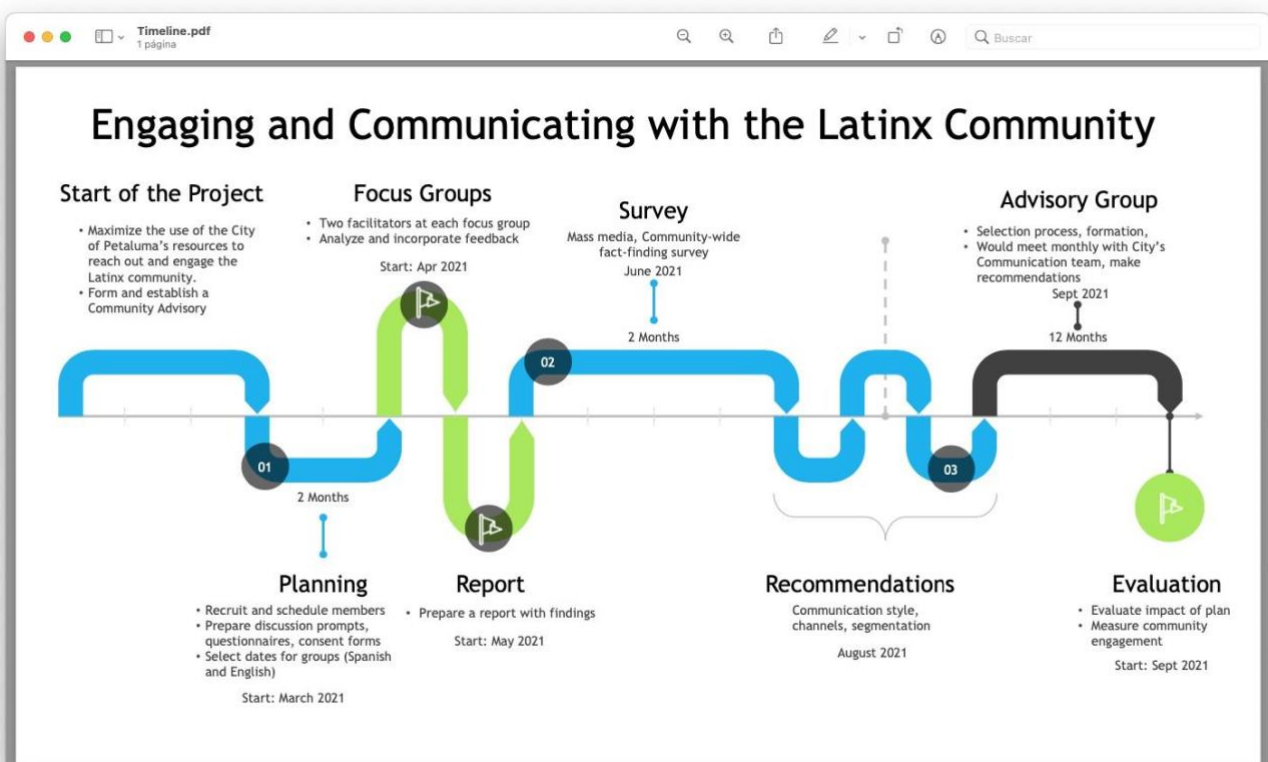
For a number of years, the City of Petaluma has been reaching out to this sizable and invaluable segment of the community. It has expanded its communication channels to include Spanish-language messaging. Among the actions taken, these are worth noting:

- Spanish translation of the City’s website.
- Spanish translations of social media posts
- Spanish translations of all Electronic Community Updates
- Spanish translations of all Electronic Business Updates
- Spanish translations of other printed/media materials (as needed)

Most recently, it has also assigned resources to offer live simultaneous Spanish-language translation of these public meetings:

- Ad Hoc Community Advisory Committee
- General Plan Advisory Committee
- Other relevant public meetings (as needed) E.g. City’s Goals and Priorities meetings

Scope of Work – Timeline (as set in the original proposal, March 2021)



What we set out to do

Our initial proposal was to evaluate the City of Petaluma’s communication and inclusion strategies with its Latinx community and to offer recommendations towards improved engagement and a more efficient use of the City’s resources.

This report intends to review and analyze the findings of our work over the last four months with a group of Latinx community members, all adults residents of Petaluma or with deep roots in the City. We will include our initial recommendations for engaging and communicating with this community.

What we have done so far

We started our work by recruiting community members that would self-identified as Latino/Latina/Latinx and that were willing to contribute to a working group that will share with

us their preferences and perceptions around community engagement and communication. This recruitment happened in different ways: by direct contact of selected people, by word of mouth and by announcements on the City's weekly newsletter Community Updates. Having achieved our minimum goal of at least 8 people that agreed and committed to participate in this workgroup, we then created a WhatsApp group (*Comunidad Petaluma*) that would allow participants to introduce themselves and familiarize with each other. WhatsApp is a communication platform familiar to all the participants and it allowed us to create a space of trust, one in which the participants would feel safe to express themselves and start a process of bonding with each other.

We were able to engage the participants in WhatsApp-based assignments they could respond on their own time. Our goal at this time was to give us a setting, prepare the stage for a focus group session. The first assignment we presented to the workgroup entailed them making a short video introducing themselves to the other members of the group. Along with their personal information, participants shared their occupations, tastes and interests. The next assignment asked them to share on the topics that appeal to them the most, the communication channels they use for getting information, staying on top of the news and for entertainment. And lastly, we ask them about their use of social media. We tabulated all these responses in an Excel spreadsheet. (See attached)

Once participants had completed all these assignments, we initially schedule one focus group session to be done over Zoom, but because we could not get a large majority of participants in just one focus group, we ended up doing two separate sessions. These were two hours long each and with 5 and 3 participants respectively. In both sessions, we started by asking participants about what do like best about Petaluma and immediately after, we initiated a guided conversation around their preferences for communication in general and specifically about the communication channels the City of Petaluma currently uses. A summary of what was asked and what were the responses is also attached to this report.

Review and Analysis

About participants' places of origin, their lives and their vision of the City of Petaluma.

The workgroup we were able to put together for this project is made up of a mix of diverse individuals, with different places of origin, diverse occupations, and different levels of belonging. 7 of the 9 community members recruited and that participated fully in our workgroup either come from Mexico or have roots in that country, while one is a Chilean immigrant and the other a Venezuelan refugee under political asylum. They all have arrived in Petaluma in different situations and stages of their lives and are quite diverse as far as what their occupations go, ranging from a highly educated professional, to an experienced adult educator, a self-made graphic designer, and to non-professionals community members that work in service and manufacturing sector, home cleaning services, stay-at-home mom and grandmothers and in the retirement age but still active as an entrepreneur.

Something that struck out with us is that all the participants have strong social networks with ties to nonprofit agencies or community organizations and resources. In way or another, all of them expressed that they give back to their community in whatever way they can, aspiring towards community collaboration and helping other human beings.

Participants told us that what they valued the most about Petaluma has to do with how welcoming and warmth its people are, their solidarity to strangers and their kindness and caring spirit in specific towards the Latinx community. We heard that they also value Petaluma

for its safety, calmness, that people can go on living without fear and that they can move around freely. They also shared that they admire Petaluma's scenic beauty, its streets and neighborhoods and all the landscapes. They also let us know that another strong quality of life factor they have experienced in Petaluma is that it offers opportunities to those that arrive here, for employment certainly but also for education as well as access to health care and other high-quality services. We understand these hubs to be a variable to consider for is in these places and instances where information flows and the main human interactions occur.

Our impression is that to this group of people, a very relevant factor in their lives is the way they are treated and made feel, giving them a sense of hope and belonging as they integrate in a society that is very different than the one they are coming from. What we perceived is that for this community, a strong social network is very relevant for communication purposes, for it is from there where the information becomes trustworthy, where the most applicable tips and advice to their lives also come from and where they build cross-references with others.

About participants' communication channels used with people in their social network (friends and family, coworkers, neighbors)

All the participants told us they use WhatsApp to stay in touch with their close contacts, that is those that live nearby but also with their family and friends in their places of origin. What they tell us about this platform that relates to them is in the ease of sending messages, photos and audios, the possibility of joining in or assembling groups and the instantaneity of it. Most mentioned that they do make regular phone calls, particularly for communicating with family members. Some mentioned using video calls, the large majority of them also using WhatsApp. We also heard they do use Social Media like Facebook Messenger to communicate with others. Worth noticing is that only two participants told us they use Instagram. Interestingly, they tell us that lately they have used Zoom for meetings, particularly for work or for school related issues. And lastly but still worth noting is that for some the personal encounters still is a way of communicating with others, not only in our regular daily spaces but also when they decide to visit a neighbor, a relative or others.

What this information tells us is that WhatsApp becomes a key communication channel that needs to be considered central because it is already part of their daily lives and because is part of the culture of the community at-large.

About participants' use of social media and other digital platforms

Facebook is the most used social media app among this group of community members. They tell us that the main use they make of this platform is to meet family/friends or share content with them. They also use it to find out about some news or activities of interest and to be entertained. In some cases, they mention that they participate in streaming or Facebook Live, especially with the younger family members. Another social media mentioned by participants is Instagram, also use for informational, entertainment, consumer and content dissemination purposes and for private IG groups for internal group communication. The other social media mentioned is YouTube, and it used to watch videos, news, or smaller productions. Some participants produce videos of their own. They also mentioned listening to music on the internet and of course watching movies, with Netflix as the most named movie platform.

We see that Facebook becomes important medium for proposing communications because its use is very widespread, across the different socio-cultural backgrounds. We find relevant to observe and analyze in detail the types of publications and pages that the community follows, the interactions that occur, and the languages the Latino community feels most summoned.

About participants' use mass media through which they are informed

When we asked participants which media they use to be informed of the news events, they mentioned several. The majority told us that they use digital, tv, printed or multimedia channels. When we asked about language preferences most participants told us they prefer Spanish media. Only 3 of the nine community members use bilingual or English-language media indistinctly. Some of the media they follow: Telemundo and Univision TV stations, the local Impulso News, both in print and digitally (and they appreciate the translations of local news into Spanish), El Superior (another small newspaper found in markets and other places), the Argus Courier (digital) and La Prensa de Sonoma (Spanish)/Press Democrat both in print and digital and ACI Prensa (Catholic News Agency). They also mentioned listening to bilingual Radio KBBF, and lingering from the Tubbs fires of 2017, one participant told us she listens to KSVY and KSRO.

We would like to propose, for the next stage, an analysis of these media outlets: the content they produce, the type of language they use, the type of news they prioritize, the type of readers who choose them. This analysis can give us clues to understand what the community is looking for in the media it consumes.

About participants' topics of greatest interest

The topic most mentioned has to do with Immigration issues: laws, immigration policies, etc. Other topics of interest mentioned were the different types of aid for the community and economic stimulus announced by the Governor, debt reduction (such as student debt), home security, community events, child development, health issues such as COVID and healthy eating, religious, music, literature, sports, politics and remediations for people who were evicted from their home or neighborhood, for those who were sent to jail or other forms discrimination. Another relevant issue is the cultural one, linked to the consumption of music and literature, or of artistic and handicraft productions.

One important aspect we found is that several participants have great religious devotion. This theme summons them and they recognize this space that connects them with others, that allows them to help others.

About participants' main channels of communication in regards to news about Petaluma

When we inquired about how they stay on top of what is happening in Petaluma, participants told us of different resources, nothing formal and without much reinforcement. The information channels from which they stay informed about local events are informal, heterogeneous and partial. Among the communication channels mentioned are:

- By mail/email: notices in the water service bill or subscription to a newsletter.
- By telephone: by group messages, by the police alert service.
- Through their neighbors or through children who watch news, in media outlets that are exclusively in English.
- La Pulga de Petaluma on Facebook (informs about events, festivals, works)
- 211. Information for community help

Nobody could mention media or channels where the information about the city is gathered and complete. In general, they told us about specific topics that they find out through one channel or another. This finding may seem to point out that there is a vacant space in terms of media that is focused on and reach the Latinx community with diverse local topics.

About participants' knowledge of the official communication channels of the Government of Petaluma

When asked about the City of Petaluma's own media (website, Facebook page, Instagram page), only one of the participants expressed knowing or having visited them. They told us that the City has many assistance programs of interest to the Latinx community, but that the community knows very little about them, that the news, activities or calls for action do not reach Latinos. They point out that to arrive at information there must be an interest of the person to inquire. According to what they tell us, the Latinx community is not spontaneously receiving official information.

This indicates that, in addition to analyzing the way in which the current City media is proposing communication, we must ask ourselves about the channels that are being used and the ways in which the information is designed to circulate.

Below are some observations that came up from analyzing three examples of City Facebook posts with the participants of the focus group:

About the City of Petaluma's Facebook page:

- Participants perceived an attempt to send a diversity message but the characters that appear in the image do not seem representative to them. They also point out that there is a lack of any member of the Asian community.
- The aesthetic does not "dialogue" or engage with the aesthetic codes of the Latinx community. In the sense of simplicity in the use of the image.
- The header is in English.

About the way the news is published:

- Participants told us that to read the Spanish text, you have to scroll down the page, they saw the page in English and were looking for the translated text. Studies show that people read only the first 3 lines of a publication on social media and this seems to confirm that is not a common practice in the Latinx community.
- Several indicated that they would like the City to produce a communications channel in Spanish, aimed specifically at the Latinx Community.
- They consider that the Latino community is very visual and that it reads little. For this reason, they observe that the image should communicate a little more: synthesize the main message and be attractive from the colors, empathy, closeness. The images that are being used are good photos, but they fail to inform what the text says and they do not always dialogue with the aesthetic culture of the Latino community.

About the City's website:

- It does not seem intuitive to them. They find it difficult to know how and where to look for what is needed.

Other considerations:

- One of the factors that participants pointed out as relevant in responding why the City's communications are not reaching the Latinx community is that many of its members do not have enough civic education to participate fully just yet. For this reason, they believe that if for example there would be a call to participate in a community board or committee, it needs to be more accessible, or friendlier, offering facilities and known references they can relate to. There is fear of not knowing, not being capable, or being excluded by the language.

If we were to announce such opening, there ought to be a clarification on how the council works, who is on it, build trust, and explain why Latinos and Latinas can also join it.

- There are cultural traits that condition participation. People wonder if they will be able to understand. There is fear and a barrier that puts distance and that must be analyzed when outreaching and communicating.

Initial Recommendations

Based on the information collected and the analysis of the participants responses to the assignments on WhatsApp group and from the conversations that emerged in the focus group sessions, below we would like to leave you with an initial set of recommendations that can help guide communication strategies to reach the Latinx community more effectively and to generate spaces for participation and bonding. We will share these recommendations so that they can be addressed in phases, to evaluate the results and adjust the activities undertaken.

1. Surveys.

Something that was already proposed in the initial proposal is the realization of a massive survey, which will allow transferring the information collected in a focused way, with the aim of obtaining statistical information and being able to generalize some of the hypotheses that arouse from this first stage of our work. The Survey we plan to create would also allow characterizing the type of consumption, preferences and content. Also, it will delve into the use of social media, which pages the community follows the most and the type of interactions in which they participate. Finally, the survey is in itself an instrument capable of raising concerns and generating expectations regarding the subject to which it refers. In that sense, it is already a communication strategy, insofar as, consulting for the interests, for the opinions and for the recommendations that the community may make to the government, is expressing a willingness to listen and generating a real scope for participation.

2. Design specific communication channels for the Latinx community

Another specific recommendation we would like to propose is something that came up from what the participants themselves asked for, and is to generate media that are directed to the Latinx community from their perspective. What this implies is that instead of translating the website, Facebook or Instagram, those same platforms ought to be developed in Spanish-language, with a matrix based on the characteristics of the Latinx community, of a way that generates greater identification, support and feeling of closeness.

3. Review language, codes and aesthetics

This third recommendation has to do with the way in which messaging appears in the different media that are used. That is, it refers to the languages, aesthetics and formats that are used when communicating. Based on the observations that emerged from participants when analyzing the city's communications efforts, we can suggest different aspects to consider:

Texts and language

- Use short and simple texts.
- Explain the central idea in the first lines.
- Highlight key or central words.
- You can use vignettes with emojis, which help to read easily and attract attention.
- Use colloquial, simple, everyday language.
- In some cases, use an informal and emotional language (second person singular) to speak in a personalized way to the reader.

Topics

- As far as the topic selections to communicate, we suggest the use of official information regarding programs, government measures, benefits or activities alternated with other content related to the city, the community, or situations that generate empathy, identification and well-being. For examples these kinds of messaging ("Colorful Notes") the participants suggested the publication of anecdotal or testimonial notes, such as the graduation of students of the Latino community from schools, or the places in the City that the Latinx community visits and enjoys the most, or lists of favorite movies and music, or issues related to health and healthy eating.
- Address issues that are of their main concerns.
- When announcing an opening for civic participation, participants suggested to make sure the places to apply or access are trustworthy and close to the community and that it is explicit that they are handled in Spanish.

About the visuals/aesthetic

- Place a lot of emphasis on the use of images as the main way of communicating with a highly visual and non-reader community.
- The image must be attractive, colorful, include photos of people or situations that generate identification and also illustrations. 7 participants explicitly mentioned a Spring-like aesthetic.
- The image may also include well-known characters and references for the community,
- The image/flyers should synthesize the main information, so that it allows the viewer to understand what is being talked about, without having to read the entire text.

About Language

We already mentioned the need to privilege the Spanish language media content.

Use of Videos

- Use short, spontaneous videos and in some cases produced by the community, to share in stories and in social media posts.
- The videos should be dynamic, with a short and clear script they can summarize the most relevant information and generate higher levels of adherence.
- They can be animated videos (graphic animations), video recorded with people talking, or videos produced as a fictional short, set to music and titled.
- In all cases, it is convenient to work with audiovisual producers (in the case of productions that aspire to higher quality) or with a community manager (for instant stories that reflect a spontaneous situation).
- Examples of videos: City staff and Council to record videos in Spanish directed to the Latinx community/the inauguration of a public facility/vaccination pop out clinics by neighborhoods

Develop direct communication of government leaders and the community

- Another proposal that emerged in our work was the possibility of government staff, Council to engage directly with the community. This can also be from short videos published in stories, or slightly longer videos on IGTV, or live events on social media scheduled and announced beforehand.

The importance of emotions

- In all cases, these suggestions are based on recognizing the relevance of emotional and sensitive language for the Latinx community, which appeals to the senses and feelings (memories, experiences, the known, affection)

4. Adding another communication channel (first stage)

Recruit and create broadcast lists in the WhatsApp platform

In order to expand the reach of the City's media one of the first communication measures we recommend would be to add the use of broadcast lists in the WhatsApp platform. Since this app is the most used communication for everyday community communications, as far as we could see at this point. It will allow the City to reach the cell phone of every person that saves the City's phone number as a contact in a personalized way and use various formats: flyer, audios, videos, links. For this, it is recommended to create distribution lists classified by sectors, neighborhoods or some other variable. And send short messages, always with a graphic plate and a short text that uses emojis and simple expressions.

Example of WhatsApp announcement from another local government asking its residents to join distribution lists:



Adding a YouTube channel (following stages)

Platform in which City could systematically publish and store all audiovisual productions referring to non-news topics but rather to the record of activities, experiences and situations that make sense to have (see video section)

Printed posters/brochures

To install in spaces with a lot of concurrence of the Latino community, such as schools, hospitals, churches, etc. Ideas such as community bulletin boards, billboards were mentioned where up-to-date information was posted, especially about calls for social assistance or for the participation in civic affairs.

Collaboration with other social organizations and community leaders as mediators

Having key organizations and community leaders as links to Latinx Community is central in communication, not only to convey information but also to listen and detect needs, concerns and proposals. In this sense, we recommend identifying or training community leaders/promoters who can be a bridge between the city government and the community, generating spaces for conversation that, in some cases, could be regular meetings or dialogue instances. We suggest continuing the work with our “Comunidad Latina” WhatsApp group and incorporate them in the solutions.