Positive Crossroads: Mexican Consular Assistance and Immigrant Integration

The United States and Mexico share one of the largest borders in the world. This presents challenges and opportunities for the citizens living on both sides of the border. The relationship between the United States and Mexico is a rich and complex one, and it has been adapting and maturing over time. The two countries not only maintain an important economic and commercial relationship with a great deal of potential, but they also share the responsibility for other important issues, such as immigration flows and immigrant integration.

Mexico’s consular network is the largest and most extensive of any foreign government in the U.S. Composed of 50 consulates across the U.S., these consular offices are well known for providing services to Mexican citizens who live in the U.S., such as the issuance of official Mexican documents and the provision of legal services, community advocacy and legal representation before local law enforcement agencies. The consular offices are strategically located in many cities in the U.S.

For the last twenty years, and especially since 2003, with the creation by a presidential decree of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME), the Mexican Consulates have fostered and developed programs and initiatives to assist, educate and help Mexican citizens living in the U.S. These efforts involve collaboration with several types of organizations, including local governments, school districts, public libraries, faith-based organizations, police departments and the private sector. These initiatives and programs include Educational Community Halls/Plazas Comunitarias, scholarships for Mexican high school students to attend colleges and universities in the U.S., Mexican book donation drives and diverse online educational programs. Other important health-related programs include Health Windows at consular sites, national health fairs and training for health promoters. Other initiatives are focused on financial education, events featuring Mexican cuisine and sporting and cultural events. In addition, there are several programs that promote business development and the use of remittances for social development in Mexican hometowns.

It is important to mention that similar innovative and unique efforts could be replicated in other areas in the country through the establishment of strategic alliances or partnerships among consulates, mayors, local and state officials, the private sector, faith-based organizations, community organizations and others. This report includes a selection of successful practices developed in different regions of the U.S. by the Mexican Consulates with their local partners. It represents a small sample of the excellent programs developed by Mexican Consulates that are supporting immigrant integration in U.S. cities.
Consulate General of Mexico in Los Angeles
Mexican Population: 1,779,913 (Source: ACS 2010 3-year estimates)
Contact: Consul David Figueroa Ortega, (213) 351-6800, lapublico@sre.gob.mx

Collaboration with the American Red Cross. Through an agreement with the American Red Cross and with support of local authorities, the consulate prepares the local Mexican population for emergencies and natural disasters. These efforts help to build trust and improve relations with local law enforcement agencies.

Juvenile Court Project. The establishment of a new protocol between the Consulate of Mexico and the Juvenile Court of Los Angeles enhances the communication among parents who have lost the custody of their children. Many workshops have improved the communication between parents and the judicial authorities in the area.

Consulate General of Mexico in Chicago, Illinois
Mexican Population: 667,627 (Source: ACS 2010 3-year estimates)
Contact: Consul Eduardo Arnal Palomera, (317) 738-2383, conchicago@sre.gob.mx

Educational Opportunities Window. The Educational Opportunities Window (EOW) is an alliance between the consulate in Chicago and several educational organizations and universities in the Chicago area. This initiative distributes information about universities, adult education programs and English classes to Mexicans living in the Chicago area. Students of the universities participate in this partnership as volunteers, informing parents and students about available programs and scholarship. This initiative highlights the importance of early education and holds events and local school activities to disseminate this information.

Financial Education and Family Heritage Program. Working with local financial and banking institutions, the consulate has been developing financial education programs, including a series of workshops and presentations on topics such as consumer protection, housing and small business development. Several federal, local and private institutional partners collaborate in this initiative.

Consulate General of Mexico in Phoenix, Arizona
Mexican Population: 446,201 (Source: ACS 2010 3-year estimates)
Contact: Consul Victor Manuel Trevino Escudero, (602) 242-7398, conphoenix@sre.gob.mx

Dialogues between Jewish and Latino Leaders. In order to develop better relations among Jewish and Latino diasporas, the consulate and local organizations organized several workshops between leaders and representatives of the Jewish and Latino communities in the Phoenix area. These meetings educated participants on the importance of dialogue, diversity, ethnic relations, business opportunities and the future of their communities.

Child’s Day Festival. The consulate and local and private organizations, in collaboration with local authorities, organized the Child’s Day, which takes place in shelters for immigrant children and is intended to educate and amuse them. This project includes fun and educational activities for the youth, such as a health fair, sports competitions, cultural activities and art workshops. High school and college students also volunteer in this event to help their community. They also distribute important information and children books during Child’s Day.
IME Scholarships. The Consulate of Mexico in San José raised more funds than any other Mexican consulate in the U.S. for the IME scholarship program in 2011. Raising more than $1 million, the consulate helped Mexican students, most of them farmworkers, to participate in certified labor training in the Center for Employment located in the California cities of Soledad, Gilroy and San José.

Mixtec Language. In an effort to integrate the Mexican community into the local community in Oxnard, the consulate has developed the Mixtecan program, which offers classes, workshops and seminars in the Mixtecan language, an indigenous dialect spoken by many Mexican nationals living in the area. Another important example of the community’s commitment to integrate local indigenous communities is the availability of information in indigenous languages on the consulate’s website, as well as in the health services provided in the consulate, which allow for an efficient and direct communication with the local indigenous Mexican population.

Leadership Development Program. In order to develop and promote leadership, the consulate, in collaboration with local organizations, executives and city leaders, has developed a new leadership program through the “Cien Amigos” group. This group organizes several events, such as the Women’s Conference, the Mentoring Program, college fairs, fundraisers for the IME scholarship program and the Mexico-California Advocacy Day. The group is a 501c non-profit organization created to help and promote a new generation of Latino leaders in the Sacramento area.

Mobile Health Window. Established in 2011, the Mobile Health Window for Southwest Kansas was developed in collaboration with Kansas University (KU) to provide services to the Mexican population in Dodge City, Great Bend, Garden City, Liberal and Ulysses, Kansas. This initiative provides health education, sources and services, such as information on disease prevention, referrals to local health providers and basic health services offered by KU medical staff to the immigrant population in the area. It was officially launched in 2012 as a program to serve the Mexican population living an average of 6 hours from the Consulate.

Garden City Community College/Consulate Partnership. This partnership is focused on adult education and has successfully created three educational programs. The “Plaza Comunitaria” is directed to students that want to complete Mexican elementary and secondary education. The second program is called “Edukan,” which offers online bilingual professional training. In addition, the “1+2 Program” provides a certificate in Industrial Maintenance to employees who work in a local beef processing plant.
Consulate of Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico
Mexican Population: 35,278 (Source: ACS 2010 5-year estimates)
Contact: Consul Mauricio Ibarra Ponce de Leon, (505) 247-2147, consulmex@consulmexalb.net

Community Plazas Program in the CIBOLA Prison. This educational initiative and plaza is considered a national role model for all prisons, because it offers courses for Latino inmates so that they can start or finish adult literacy, elementary or middle school programs. It also offers English as a second language, along with computer and GED courses. More than 615 inmates took these courses in 2011.

Consulate of Mexico in Calexico, California
Mexican Population: 16,547 (Source: ACS 2010 3-year estimates)
Contact: Consul Gina Andrea Cruz Blackledge, (760) 357-3863, infocalexico@sre.gob.mx

Breakfast for Farmworkers. Because of their extended workday, farmworkers have limited access to health services. Farmworkers start their workday before sunrise and finish after sunset. According to the local Mexican consulate, most of the farmworkers in the area are Mexican or are of Mexican origin. In order to reach this sector of the population, the consulate organizes special breakfasts before sunrise, where farmworkers can eat and also gain access to preventive health services on site. Also, the local health and police departments offer services and distribute important information in a friendly environment at these breakfasts. This initiative reaches hundreds of farmworkers in the area.

Consulate of Mexico in Anchorage, Alaska
Mexican Population: 4,399 (Source: ACS 2010 5-year estimates)
Contact: Consul Javier Abud Osuna, (907) 334-9573, consulmexalaska@gci.net

Financial Education Workshop for Children. In collaboration with financial entities and local public schools, the consulate has developed an innovative financial education program focused on elementary and middle school students. In this program, children learn basic financial concepts through play. By learning basic economic concepts and terms, children can easily understand their role in the economy and improve their future finances.

About This Publication
Ricardo Gambetta is manager of the Immigrant Integration Programs in the Center for Research and Innovation at the National League of Cities. The National League of Cities is the nation’s oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. NLC is a resource and advocate for more than 1,600 member cities and the 49 state municipal leagues, representing 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans. Through its Center for Research and Innovation, NLC provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities, creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches in cities.

The Immigrant Integration Program at NLC wants to express its gratitude to the Mexican Government for its support in the preparation of this report. Special thanks to the staff of the Embassy of Mexico in Washington D.C., the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) for their guidance and assistance in the development of this publication.