

Rhode Island Latino Arts | Latino History Project

393 Broad St Suite 106, Providence, RI 02907 • www.rilatinoarts.org | info@rilatinoarts.org • www.nuestrasraicesri.org

How to mobilize and create excitement for a Latino Cultural Corridor

Questions to Ponder

How can we engage America's diverse communities in sharing and preserving the stories and places that matter to them?

How can we combine the use of the humanities, the arts and preservation

of one's heritage to create economic opportunities for Latino businesses?

How can we give voice to those whose voice is rarely heard and at the same time develop self-pride and neighborhood pride that stimulates action.

In 1991 Rhode Island Latino Arts launched the Latino History Project in response to a lack of basic and historical information about the state's fastest growing immigrant group. Since then, the project has been embraced by a group of diverse stakeholders: Latino youth and elders; non-Latino stakeholders seeking information and ways to form partnerships; and a diverse group of business owners and residents of the neighborhood in the City of Providence where the project takes place.

Here are some tips, along with challenges and suggested solutions, for anyone who is seeking ways to bridge communities of color and to work with and understand immigrant residents of a local neighborhood who value and wish to educate others about their cultures.



CHALLENGES

If you are not from the dominant local Latino group, in some communities you may not be considered a true representative voice of the local Latino community.

If you are not familiar with local governmental agencies or funders, or how funding works in your community, you may find that you have to work extra hard to learn the ropes and build trust.

In the case of the bus shelters, it took me almost three years to get full approval to install the *fotohistorias*, and for RIPTA to realize and fully understand the power of this project and how it relates to its own mission.

Funding. Funding. Funding ... or lack thereof!

In my case, what appeared to be similar projects began to surface and the limited resources available for arts projects and those of communities of color were stretched thin.

Eventually, local groups, government agencies or funders began to show interest in my work/project and invited me to meetings. But quickly I realized I was the only person of color at the table, and I began to feel that my voice or perspective were not important. Sometimes it felt that things were moving in very slow motion. Other times it appears there was no progress at all.

SOLUTIONS

Find those "voices" or leaders in the community that you seek to work with. Get to know them, their habits, their strengths and also weaknesses. Give them opportunities to get to know *you* better.

Attend open public meetings in City Hall, state agencies, RFP sessions and learn the ropes. Get to know peers and leaders in the arts community and local organizations, and allow them to get to know you as a trusted individual.

Create allies within the private and public sectors, i.e. the local councilperson, others in city hall or state agencies that can offer support. Communicate often and ask lots of questions to better understand regulations and guidelines. Patience is key!

Don't get discouraged if you don't get large grants – small grants can go a long way and may offer teaching moments or unveil perspectives that are more relevant in smaller phases; can open new doors at each place in time where you are as the project unfolds.

Create allies and form partnerships to avoid duplication of efforts, misunderstandings or overuse of limited community resources. Stay alert, remain positive and invite people to the table at every level.

Always remember that you are the best advocate for your project, but that there's always room for others to sit at the table. Learn to educate and not be adversarial or a know-it-all. Always be professional and inclusive of all sides, and also be open to listening to different points of view. However, do insist that other like-minded community members are at the table with you!

Nuestras Raíces: Building Bridges and Community Pride Around Latino History in Rhode Island

Timeline	Tasks	Action Steps	RILA's Partners
Ongoing	Build community trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify partners & collaborators (be inclusive) Build relationships Listen for potential opportunities & connections Respond to community's call to action (as appropriate; set realistic and actionable goals) Share ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local community organizations Creative sector, including the humanities, preservation groups, higher ed Business owners, trusted voices Cross-sector partners Interested / Residents / Trusted Voices
	Collaborate with others	Scan the landscape for potential partners and resources (traditional and unconventional)	RIPTA, Planning Dept, local elected officials, funders
Preliminary Planning	Seize opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to National call & partner with existing advocacy work Strengthen/create local connection Be strategic about approach (guidelines, deadlines) 	National Trust HP/Latinos in Heritage Conservation AC+T, PPS, RHPC/RIPTA
	Do Your Homework	Be informed - study existing principals of cultural preservation & the arts, with focus on underserved communities Brief your colleagues - share research-based evidence	LHC, NALAC, NTHP, NEA PPS
	Draw on Existing Plans	Research, review and honor documents & work already created Supplement with recent research/trends	City/RIPTA/AC+T Literature scan
	Invite Others to Participate/Partner	Recognize that your community are your best advocates - solicit feedback and support	Latino orgs, Latino business group(s), neighborhood grps "Trusted Voices"
	Learn From Place	Understand the local context (social, cultural, political, economic)	Core partners
Planning for Planning	Plan to Invite Even More Participants to the Table	Engage larger group of thinkers - ask your stakeholders to identify stakeholders, open up the call	Keep doing "Ongoing" (see above) - you can't know everyone!
	Establish a Work Plan	Clarify responsibilities and timeline	Projects Assistant/ Community Partners
	Communicate and Track Progress	Build flexible systems	Projects Assistant/ Community Partners
	Be Realistic About Deliverables	Develop realistic performance metrics	Projects Assistant/ Community Partners
	Prepare for Potential Obstacles (as much as possible)	Assess and respond to changing conditions (planning processes are learning processes)	Core partners
Ongoing	Always Be Ready for Future Opportunities	Lay the groundwork for future collaborations	Everyone

Marta V. Martinez, Executive Director Rhode Island Latino Arts | Project Director, Latino History of Rhode Island
 marta@rlatinoarts.org | 401-486-9095