



# Summary of Issues to be Considered in Program Recruitment





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### BACKGROUND STATEMENT

A primary challenge in the delivery of marriage and relationship education services is couple recruitment. Engaging couples to participate in a relationship education program is complex and can be especially challenging when working with Hispanic/Latino<sup>1</sup> couples. Linguistic limitations and distinct cultural characteristics may pose challenges to practitioners and program developers when reaching out to Hispanic couples. An awareness and understanding of certain cultural nuances may assist programs in effectively recruiting and retaining Hispanic participants. Four factors contributing to the successful recruitment of Latino couples are outlined in this memo:

- Understanding the Hispanic Audience
- Preserving Public Image
- Building Trust
- Marketing Messages

The discussion of these topics is intended to provide practitioners and program developers with insight regarding Hispanic culture in order to enhance recruitment of Hispanic couples for participation in marriage and relationship education programs. This memo is not intended to be a complete discussion of the issue of couple recruitment, but rather summarizes advice received from researchers and practitioners in the Hispanic community as part of the Supporting Healthy Marriage and Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) Joint Research Meeting held on September 12-13, 2005 in Washington, DC; a research meeting held in conjunction with the Hispanic Healthy Marriage National Conference, May 11, 2006, in San Antonio, Texas; and a research meeting held on September 15-16, 2006 in St. Louis, MO in conjunction with a conference sponsored by the Center for Latino Family Research.

### LESSONS LEARNED

#### *Understanding the Hispanic Audience*

A thorough understanding of the Hispanic population, with respect to values in relation to family structure, gender roles, acculturation levels, language preference, and educational capacity is required for successful recruitment of couples for marriage and relationship education programs. These factors may differ from mainstream culture and will likely influence whether or not a Latino couple chooses to participate in any given program. Practitioners and program developers must be sensitive to these issues and incorporate them in recruitment efforts to effectively engage Hispanic couples.

Latino relationships are embedded in cultural values of "*familismo*", meaning more emphasis is placed on child rearing, family activity and family obligation than on the couple. Latino families are likely to

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Hispanic and Latino will be used interchangeably throughout this document.





live in multi-generational homes with parents, grand-parents, aunts, and other members of the extended family. In many instances, a couple will turn to family members for guidance before discussing issues related to marriage elsewhere. Such strong family connections have implications for how a program will recruit Hispanic participants. Recruitment efforts focused solely on the couple relationship may be ineffective and actually discourage Hispanic couples from participating. Marriage is often viewed, and valued, in the context of children and the extended family. Recruitment efforts that neglect to address this perception may send the message that the family is less important than the couple dyad. In many Latino families, the couple relationship is not distinct from the family unit. Practitioners should include children and extended family members in recruitment efforts and program design in the context of both enhancing the couple relationship and strengthening the family.

Program developers may be more successful in their recruitment strategies by understanding how gender roles impact the family and the decision to participate in a marriage or relationship education program. “*Marianismo*” is a value typically associated with Hispanic females promoting family-centered behaviors and placing the family’s health and well-being primarily in the hands of women. Marketing messages that focus on marriage education in the context of family well-being may have more success engaging Hispanic women.

“*Machismo*” is the counterpart to “*marianismo*” and refers to the presence of males as the dominant figure in the family structure and as the primary decision maker. *Machismo* is often mistakenly understood only to refer to the dominance and pride of males relative to females. However, the stereotypical “*macho*” trait also contains positive elements that are often overlooked. For example, strong familial ties and the desire to protect the family are positive aspects of *machismo* that are important to consider when reaching out to Latino men. Furthermore, gaining respect in the community and providing for their families is important to Latino men. Emphasis is placed on having a strong work ethic, which can translate into willingness to sacrifice in order to support other family members. Consideration should be given to the importance Hispanic men place on the family and their role as father and provider when recruiting couples for marriage education programs. Recruitment messages that acknowledge contributions to the family and encourage continued dedication to their wives, children and extended family may be appealing to Hispanic men.

Acculturation level and language proficiency are also important factors to consider when recruiting Hispanic couples living in the United States. Younger generations, or those born in the United States, may not be grounded in Spanish, and may be knowledgeable about gaining access to marriage education services in the community. These couples may respond more openly to recruitment efforts used with mainstream culture. For example, more acculturated couples may feel at ease accessing services from an unfamiliar organization if the initial referral is from a recognizable source, such as a well-known agency or the media. In contrast, older, first generation immigrants, or Spanish-only speaking couples may require outreach, in Spanish, that reflects more traditional values of the original culture. These couples may feel most comfortable when a trusted friend or family member refers them to services at an organization that is well-known in the Hispanic community. As many Hispanic couples are influenced by both newly immigrated and more acculturated family members, program developers may need to explore using a combination of recruitment methods.





In addition to considering a couple's level of acculturation and language proficiency, program developers should take into account varying levels of education and literacy. Print materials and marketing messages should be clearly understood by the target audience. Program developers must be knowledgeable about the Hispanic population in their community and pursue recruitment methods that will effectively communicate their program's message.

Whether program developers are targeting younger, U.S. born couples or newly immigrated couples, a solid understanding of cultural ideals and concepts is crucial in order to engage Hispanic couples and families. Regardless of acculturation level or preferred language, a key element to the successful recruitment of Latino couples is relationship building. Practitioners and program staff must work to become a visible and consistent presence within the Hispanic community. This presence will help foster trusting relationships with key community leaders and existing organizations which will, in turn, support recruitment efforts.

### ***Preserving Public Image***

Many Latino adults feel that issues related to marriage are best addressed within the family. Due to the importance Hispanic couples place on the extended family, participation in a marriage or relationship education program delivered by a community-based organization may be viewed in a negative way. Couples may resist involvement in community programs out of fear that their relationship will be perceived by others as "troubled." Latino couples may also refrain from participating in programs if they feel that they will be told what is right for them by program staff. The need of many Hispanics to preserve public image suggests that practitioners should focus recruitment efforts on family strengthening and the couple's capacity to decide what is best for them. Recruiting couples within the context of the family may help dispel the notion that participation in a marriage education program denotes an inability to maintain familial unity, but rather serves as a way to enhance it. Furthermore, recruitment messages empowering couples to explore different and unique approaches to enhance their own relationship may encourage Latino couples' participation.

Another method of preserving public image, while recruiting couples for marriage education programs, is to incorporate elements of fun and family bonding into the program. Music, humor, and food are important elements of Hispanic culture and may serve multiple purposes in marriage education programs. First, incorporating these facets of the culture promotes family unity and demonstrates an understanding of the value of "*familismo*" by providing an opportunity for families to participate in intergenerational exchanges including passing down musical, literary, and culinary traditions. Second, couples may have a more positive perception of a program promoting marriage education while also encouraging participation in cultural activities and traditions. Hispanic couples may experience less anxiety related to damaging their public image if the program offers a time for fun and recreation. Finally, providing opportunities for healthy, safe, enjoyable family activities as a part of the program is another way to contradict the idea that marriage education programs are only for troubled relationships.

### ***Building Trust***

Reaching a level of "*confianza*" is critical when working with the Latino population. "*Confianza*" is related to trust and the expected reciprocity of a relationship built over time. Hispanic couples may be reluctant to participate in a program if the organization and/or program leader is unknown or distrusted





by the community. For this reason, it is imperative to seek out trusted community leaders and organizations that can assist with recruiting couples for marriage and relationship education programs. Hispanic couples are significantly more likely to respond and follow-through if a trusted friend, pastor, television or radio personality, or respected family member extends the invitation to participate in, shares about, or endorses a program.

Practitioners and program staff can also build trust by connecting with the audience. This means using culturally relevant examples, personal stories and testimonials, and speaking in the audience's preferred language if necessary. Although sharing a common language and cultural experience is important in developing trust between program staff and participating couples, caution should be taken not to assume that any Hispanic or Spanish-speaking individual will be able to establish "*confianza*" with couples. It is not uncommon within the Hispanic community for there to be tension and disdain among differing socioeconomic classes, immigration status, and even country of origin. Therefore, program staff, including the facilitator delivering educational messages, must possess characteristics of humility and sincerity to create a sense of trust among participating couples. Developing trust with Hispanic couples will not only function as a mechanism to recruit participation, but it will also assist in how the educational material is received. The relationship between Hispanic couples and the individual delivering the message is just as important, if not more important, than the message itself.

Practitioners should also be mindful of the unique stress that some Latino couples may experience related to issues of immigration. It is not uncommon for Hispanic families residing in the United States to include both documented and undocumented individuals. Survival for many undocumented individuals includes living in anonymity, constant fear, and hyper vigilance about immigration laws and agents. Undocumented Latinos may be hesitant to participate in a program, especially a government-sponsored program, for fear of deportation. Building trust or "*confianza*" becomes even more critical for program developers when working with couples who may be undocumented.

### ***Marketing Messages***

Hispanics are not unlike other groups in that specific marketing messages are required to generate interest and participation in a given program. Program developers should think about the specific characteristics of the target Hispanic audience and formulate marketing messages accordingly. There is no "one size fits all" strategy when marketing to Latino couples. The Hispanic population in the United States is extremely diverse with respect to country of origin, primary language spoken, immigration status, local culture, etc. Programs must be knowledgeable about the diversity in the local community and develop marketing messages accordingly.

For example, messages targeting younger, U.S. born Hispanic couples may be much different than those for older or newly immigrated couples. Although there will be some differences in how messages are marketed, they should embrace the cultural values unique to Latinos. For instance, "*familismo*" can be incorporated by featuring children and the extended family in marketing messages and focusing on the couple as part of the larger family unit. Values such as "*machismo*" can be included by targeting marketing messages to men's sense of responsibility and devotion to the family. As many Hispanic men value being the head of the household, practitioners may want to consider utilizing marketing messages intended to reach men first as a way to introduce the program to the rest of the family.





Messages should also include phrases that aim to preserve the public image of Hispanic couples by focusing on the strength of the couple relationship as it relates to the family. For example, couples may feel less threatened by a program that promotes “Strong Couples and Strong Marriages are the Foundation of a Strong Family” as opposed to more traditional couple-focused messages that may lead others to perceive participation as a sign of a distressed relationship.

Hispanic couples must be able to identify with the marketing messages presented. Simple translations of other “successful” mainstream marketing campaigns may not convey a true representation of the Hispanic culture, and therefore, may fail to capture the intended audience. Program developers must be sure that visual images and photos are a reflection of the Latino population and written materials use language that is common and understood by the target audience. The heterogeneity of the Hispanic population requires practitioners to be knowledgeable about Hispanics in their community so as to produce marketing messages that are specific and culturally relevant to that particular group. To ensure that marketing messages resonate with the Latino population in a specific community, program developers must consider a variety of issues, some of which include:

- Identifying whether traditional or more mainstream messages are appropriate
- Developing messages and materials in English, Spanish, or both languages
- Utilizing Spanish words and phrasing which are understood by the majority of Hispanics in the community (Mexican, South American, Central American, etc.)
- Identifying the type of media that Hispanics in a given community respond to most frequently (radio, television, newspaper, etc.)
- Incorporating images, photos and colors in printed materials that reflect Hispanic culture
- Involving trusted community members in the delivery and dissemination of marketing messages

### *Summary*

Recruiting couples for marriage and relationship education programs is challenging and the process may be further complicated due to issues of language and culture when recruiting Hispanic couples. To effectively reach the Hispanic population, program developers must be mindful of certain cultural values and characteristics that influence how couples view marriage education. This memo outlines several factors that practitioners should consider for more effective recruitment of Latino couples. Issues related to strong family connections; placing high regard on parenting and the extended family; language proficiency; public image; and trust must be understood and addressed by practitioners, program staff, and in marketing messages in order to engage Hispanic couples in marriage and relationship education programs.

