

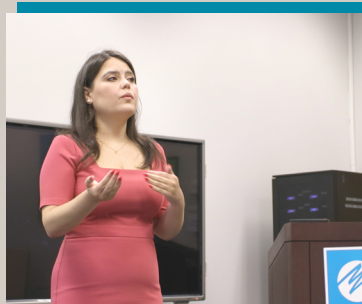
# The Latino Worker Project

Understanding the workplace experience of the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. workforce



*Within the next 20 years, America will become a “minority-majority” country, driven primarily by the growth of the Latino population. This demographic transformation will have significant implications for America’s workforce – and employers will need talent strategies that leverage the vast potential of this labor pool. Understanding the wide variation in backgrounds and experiences that make up the tapestry of the Latino workforce is essential to meeting this challenge.*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



# 01 about this report

At nearly one-fifth of the US population, Latinos are America's largest and fastest growing ethnic group, and will transform all aspects of society over the next several decades. They are already making an impact on the workforce and are projected to account for 78% of all net new workers between 2020 and 2030. An estimated 20% of all workers will be Latino by 2030.

## “What is important to you at work?”

This historic demographic shift comes at a time when companies face persistent talent shortages and challenges in attracting and retaining workers at all levels. Yet, limited resources have been devoted to understanding the workplace experiences of this talent pool. From Cubanos in South Florida to Puertorriqueños in the northeast and Mexicanos

in the southwest, US Latinos are diverse; and winning this talent war depends on delivering a value proposition that resonates with the aspirations of these workers.

In February 2023, HR Policy Association, representing Chief HR Officers at America's premier employers, launched the Latino Worker Project. Supported by 15 participating companies, the project was intended to help our members develop a deeper understanding of the Latino worker in the US. Through virtual listening sessions and in-person conversations, we spoke to over 150 workers spanning a range of roles and industries in an effort to answer a simple question: *what is important to you at work?*

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

### STUDY METHODOLOGY

Beginning in March 2023, the *Latino Worker Project* interviewed more than 150 workers representing HR Policy Association companies participating in the study. These discussions were conducted in virtual small group “listening sessions,” attended by participants who were identified through their company's Latino employee resource group (ERG). Each hour-long session began with a short poll designed to determine the most important elements of the employment relationship.

**Poll question:** *What are the top two most important factors in determining how satisfied you are with your job?*

- Good pay
- Flexible schedule and/or location (such as working from home)
- Good work environment/ company culture
- Good benefits
- Other

The remainder of the session was devoted to clarifying and developing a deeper understanding of participants' responses to the poll. To supplement the virtual listening sessions, the Project conducted research using a variety of publicly available studies and surveys, which can be found in the *Sources* section.

Throughout this report, you'll find quotes from participants; to protect their privacy, they are added without attribution.

# 02 about this report

In this report, we hope to give voice to these workers, and to the millions they represent. In painting a picture of the broad US Latino workforce, we recognize that the tremendous individual diversity within this dynamic group can, at times, be obscured. Not every observation or recommendation in this report will apply to every Latino in every situation. But we believe that to understand this workforce, it is helpful to understand what is common to most Latinos and how they experience work.

This study is based on the premise that workers are consumers of the employment value proposition in addition to being suppliers of labor. We set out to identify what influences these “consumers” to choose one job or organization over another – not simply at the time of hire, but every day. Looked at this way, we hope to give companies insight into how to market themselves more effectively to Latinos as great places to work.

**“Learn how to more effectively position your company as a great place for Latinos to work.”**

Through our discussions, we found that these workers share much in common with their colleagues of other ethnic and racial groups. We also found a strong alignment with our member companies in the belief that the power of the American economy can help everyone create the future we want, for ourselves and our families. We hope this work will start a dialogue, one that is open to discovering a new way of addressing the challenge of creating equitable and inclusive workforces that will fuel a new era of competitiveness for American companies.

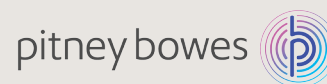
## LATINO or HISPANIC?

We use the term Latino in this project because it most closely describes the people who are the subject of this report: individuals living in the United States whose country of origin is in Latin America. The term Hispanic, which was first used by the US government for the 1970 census, is also commonly used to describe this population. Both are imperfect “umbrella” terms of convenience that conceal the true diversity of the community. In fact, in a recent study, the Pew Research Center found that 54% of the community most often identified with their specific country of origin (Mexican or Cuban, for example). We chose not to use the term Latinx, because although it is popular among academic institutions and other large organizations, it is preferred by only 3% of those whom it seeks to describe. But whatever term you prefer — Latinx, Latina, Hispanic or Latino — the debate itself shows the rich diversity of the community.

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# thank you to our participating companies

We would like to thank the Project's Participating Companies for their invaluable support of this work.



## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT:

**Arrow Electronics**, Gretchen Zeck, Chief Human Resources Officer

**Chemours**, Susan Kelliher, Senior Vice President, People

**Clorox**, Kirsten Marriner, Chief People & Corporate Affairs Officer

**Darden Restaurants, Inc.**, Sarah King, Chief People & Diversity Officer

**General Mills**, Jacqueline Williams-Roll, Chief Human Resources Officer

**Hilton Worldwide**, Laura Fuentes, Chief Human Resources Officer

**Hyatt Hotels**, Malaika Myers, Chief Human Resources Officer

**Johnson Controls, Inc.**, Marlon Sullivan, Chief Human Resources Officer

**Mastercard, Inc.**, Michael Fraccaro, Chief Human Resources Officer

**NextEra Energy**, Deb Caplan, EVP, Human Resources and Corporate Services

**Pitney Bowes**, Andy Gold, Chief Human Resources Officer

**The Home Depot**, Tim Hourigan, Chief Human Resources Officer

**United Parcel Service**, Darrell Ford, Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief DEI Officer

**US LBM**, Wendy Radtke, Chief Human Resources Officer

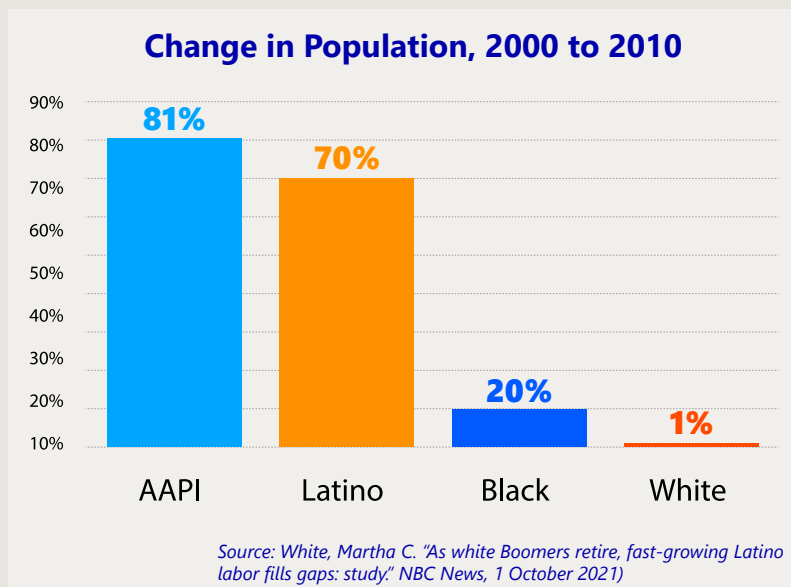
# 04 Latinos in America: By the Numbers

According to the US Census Bureau, America will experience a “minority-majority” crossover within the next 20 years, as non-Hispanic Whites will comprise less than 50% of the US population. This transformation is being driven by the growth in the Latino population. In 2022, Latinos represented 19% (63.7 million) of the US population, a seven-fold increase since 1970. By 2060, 29% of Americans are projected to be Latino. Even if immigration from Latin America were to stop completely, the shift to a minority-majority population would still take place. The numbers tell the story: America is changing.

In the decades following World War II, most of the growth in the Latino population took place in the southwest and southeast – notably in California, Texas, and Florida. But since 2000, states where Latinos historically have not settled in large numbers all

experienced substantial Latino population growth—for example, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Alabama have all experienced growth rates over 200%. Latino growth in the last 20 years has outpaced overall population growth in all 50 states and the

District of Columbia. North Dakota and South Dakota experienced the fastest growth in the Latino population—333% and 265%, respectively, while total population growth in both states was about 20%.



# 05 Latinos in America: By the Numbers

## Who is the “Latino Worker?”

To better understand the complexity of the Latino workforce, we’ll examine five specific characteristics:

- Country of Origin
- Regional Differences
- Age
- Education
- Labor Force Participation

### LATINOS TODAY

Latinos today make up one in five workers and have contributed nearly three-quarters of the entire labor force expansion since 2009.

The “average” Latino in the US is young, Mexican, lives in the southwest, holds a high school diploma and works in hospitality (women) or construction (men). But that composite sketch masks a wide variation of backgrounds and experiences that make up the tapestry of today’s Latino

workforce. Understanding both the broad similarities and specific nuances is key to creating talent strategies that will attract and engage today’s Latino worker.

### Country of Origin

The overwhelming majority (81%) of Latinos are US citizens; of those who are immigrants, 78% have lived in the US for over ten years. Immigrants are a declining share of the Latino population, representing 32% in 2021 compared to 37% in 2010. Latinos come from over 20 countries, with the largest group (60%) being those of Mexican descent. Puerto Ricans represent nine percent of the labor force, while Cubans and Dominicans each represent four percent.

In addition to cultural differences across countries of origin, Latinos have different experiences, behaviors and attitudes depending on the number of

generations since immigration. In fact, by the fourth generation, half of US adults with Latino ancestry do not identify as Latino. The further away from the immigrant experience, the more likely are Latinos to describe themselves as American rather than Latino, or by the name of their country of origin. They are also less likely to speak Spanish, attend cultural celebrations, report experiencing discrimination or have Latino friends.

Most Latinos (72% of those aged five and older) speak English at home or speak it very well, up from 65% in 2010. Among US-born Latinos, 91% are proficient in English, compared to 38% of Latino immigrants.



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## Latinos in America: By the Numbers

### Regional Differences

The diversity of the Latino community is evident in regional differences in country of origin. While most Latinos live in the southwest US – 44% live in California and Texas alone – significant Latino populations also exist in the major metropolitan areas of the east coast.

About three-quarters of Latinos in Los Angeles, Chicago and Dallas are Mexican, while the population in the cities on the east coast is far more diverse. Even within the state of Florida, the largest Latino group in Orlando is Puerto Rican, while Cubans are the most prevalent in Miami.

Recognizing these regional differences is key to developing a deeper understanding of the diversity of the Latino population.

### Age

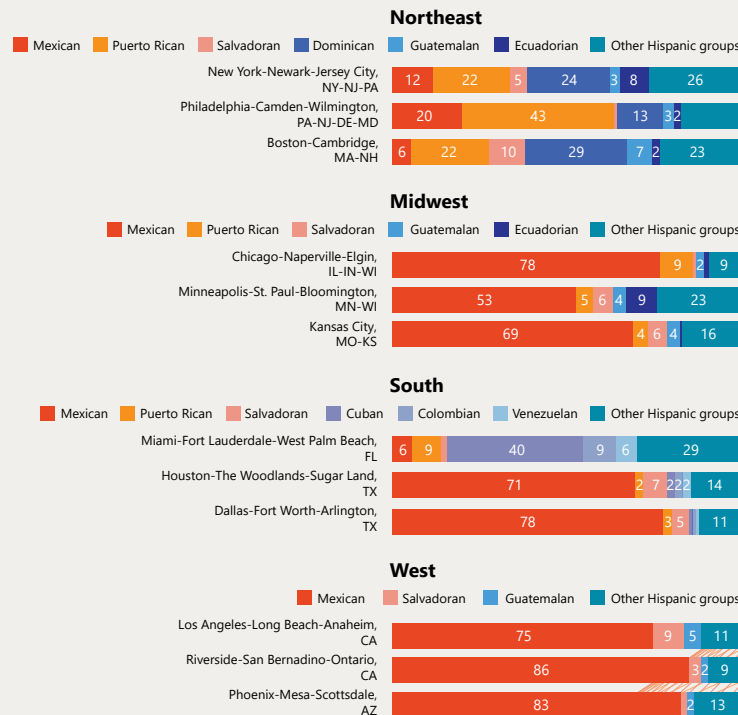
Latinos are younger than other ethnic and racial groups. The median age for Latinos is 29.8, compared to 38.5 for the overall US population. Only 8% of Latinos are over age 65, compared to 17% of the total population, and 31% of Latinos are under the age of 18, compared to 22% of Americans overall. But within the Latino community, there are wide differences. For example, Cubans, Argentinians, and Uruguayans all have a median age over 40, while the median age of Mexicans is 28.

Latinas also have higher birth and fertility rates than the population as a whole, which will drive the community's growth as a percentage of the US population.

### "ARE LATINOS WHITE?"

A study by the Pew Research Center asked respondents a two-part question about race and ethnicity. First, respondents were asked if they were Hispanic or Latino; then, they were asked their race. Of those who identified as Hispanic or Latino, 58% identified as White and 27% as two or more races. In the same study, participants were asked to identify the skin color that most closely matched their own on a scale of 1 to 10, ranging from light to dark. Eighty percent of Latinos chose one of the four lightest colors, and over 40% chose one of the two lightest.

**US Hispanic Populations are More Diverse in Northeastern Cities than in Other Metro Areas**  
% of Hispanics in US metropolitan areas in 2021 who were of \_\_ origin, by region



Note: Only the top three most populous areas for Hispanics in each region are shown. For each metropolitan area, origin groups that make up about 1% or less of the Hispanic population are shown but not labeled. Because of this and rounding, figures may not add to 100%. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the 2021 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS).

# 07 Latinos in America: By the Numbers

## Education

Latinos have among the lowest educational attainment of any racial or ethnic group in the US. Only three quarters of Latinos have completed high school, compared to over 90% of White, Black and Asian Americans. Only 20% Latinos hold a bachelors' degree, compared to 41% of Whites, 28% of Blacks and 61% of Asian Americans.

Educational attainment among Latinos showed rapid improvement from 2010 to 2019, with Latinos completing bachelors' degrees at a rate nearly three times greater than non-Latinos during the decade. As a result, the number of college-educated Latinos increased by 73% compared to an increase of 26.5% for non-Latinos. But the COVID-19 pandemic erased many of these gains, as Latino enrollment in higher education fell by 5.4 percentage points – and by 17 percentage points for community colleges.

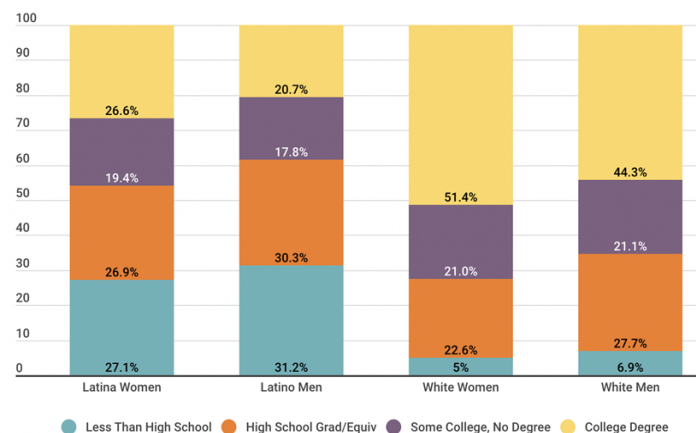
Women have driven most of the gains in educational attainment among Latinos. Over a quarter of Latinas have a college degree, compared to one-fifth of Latino men.

## Labor Force Participation

Latino men participate in the labor force at the highest rate of any ethnic or racial group – 75.4% – while Latinas have the second lowest female participation rate at 55.8%, slightly ahead of white women (55.4%). However, as Latinas are outpacing Latinos in educational attainment, their percentage of the workforce is rising faster than their male coworkers.

Latinos represent one-fifth of workers but are concentrated in a few occupations and industries. Latinos are overrepresented in categories such as painters, construction workers, maids, and housekeepers; and are more likely

FIGURE 1: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG HISPANIC AND WHITE WOMEN AND MEN (2018)



Source: Ed Trust analysis of the United States Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey (all 50 states and DC included).

than other groups to work in the construction and hospitality industries. Consequently, Latinos are underrepresented in higher-paying STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and high-tech occupations, representing just 8% of all STEM workers. Even in California, where Latinos represent almost 40% of the population, only 5.6% of Latinos have a STEM degree.

Latinos are also the least likely group to hold higher-paying management positions. In 2020, only 26% of Latinos held

management positions, compared to 35% of Blacks, 43% of Whites and 58% of Asians.

Latinos are more likely than other racial or ethnic groups to have relied on the freelance work of the gig economy to earn a living. Thirty percent of Latinos have earned money via a gig platform, compared with 20% of Blacks, 19% of Asians and 12% of Whites. Even among more ethnically and racially diverse younger adults, Latinos are more likely to earn money via gig work than either Blacks or Whites.



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# Latinos in America: By the Numbers

## Consequences for Employers

Just as the growing economic power of the Latino consumer is reshaping how companies design and market products and services, the Latino worker will increasingly shape how companies define their employment value proposition. What implications does the rise of this workforce have for employers?

### Managing a Changing Workforce

The coming demographic changes will require companies to better identify talent pools, develop compelling value propositions that resonate, and create jobs that engage these workers. The transformation to a minority-majority country will put employers on the front lines as they meet the challenge of uniting a diverse workforce. As the divisions that increasingly separate Americans continue to deepen, the workplace will become one of the few places

where people from different backgrounds, with different values, ideas, and life experiences are expected not only to co-exist, but to collaborate toward the achievement of common goals.

### Addressing the Education Gap

The fastest growing segment of the American workforce is also the least educated. This is happening at the same time as artificial intelligence-enabled technologies are disrupting and transforming how work is done. The worker of the future will need more education and new skills to avoid being displaced by technologies that are predicted to have a significant impact on entry-level white-collar jobs.

Given the current political environment, public policy solutions to address the education gap are not likely to emerge in the near term. Employers will need to invest in

the development and upskilling of new workers – recognizing that for many of these workers, education must be integrated with work. The emerging Latino workforce needs to work and learn simultaneously.

### Competing with the Gig Economy

For Latinos, non-traditional employment – the gig economy – is an economic imperative. Over-represented in low wage occupations with limited growth prospects and little or no job security, gig work is an essential source of income for these workers. But it also comes with advantages that make it easier for Latinos to weave together multiple jobs to make a living – namely, flexibility and autonomy. To create a compelling alternative, companies will not only have to offer attractive pay and benefits but will need to be open to worker desires for more control

over how, where and when work is done.

### Strategies for Employers

What strategies and messages will attract a young Latino worker for whom large corporations – and the higher education needed to succeed in their world – are viewed as unrelatable or out of reach? How can companies secure the engagement of this workforce in a manner that will make investing in their development economically viable? In short, how do companies connect with the Latino worker? To answer this question, we spoke to actual Latino workers to hear their views on what's important when it comes to their work lives.

# 09 The Voice of the Latino Worker

The “war for talent” – the competition to attract, retain and engage workers in pursuit of a company’s business goals – is one of the most critical challenges facing HR teams, as companies and workers struggle to define the terms of the post-pandemic employment relationship. Creating strategies that win with the emerging Latino workforce will require that companies understand what is important to these workers, and how their culture and values shape their attitudes and behaviors at work.

“It’s not one thing,  
but everything.”

The Latino Worker Project spoke with over 150 Latino workers from HR Policy Association member companies to gather insights into this question. These workers represent multiple industries, including hospitality, industrials, food manufacturing, restaurants,

financial services, and chemicals. Our conversations included workers in plant settings and restaurants, as well as those working in traditional office settings and from home. Most of our conversations were in the form of group virtual “Listening Sessions,” coordinated through member company Latino employee resource groups. We also spoke with a few employees in person at their worksites, as they shared their personal journey with us.

Our goal was simple: to discover what parts of a company’s employment value proposition are most important in deciding where Latinos choose to work. We presented four major categories that comprise the elements of an employment proposition, and asked participants to rank their top two; we then engaged in a discussion of their views of each of these areas and the reasons for their rankings. The four elements were good pay, flexibility (schedule/location), good work

## WHAT’S IMPORTANT TO LATINOS AT WORK

**Good Pay:** While not as important as the overall work environment, good pay is valued because it is the primary factor driving the ability to provide for family and attain life goals. It is also viewed as a form of recognition for one’s work and is a sign of how one is viewed by the organization.

**Flexibility:** Flexibility was one of the most important factors across all participants, as it was viewed as the key making work fit into life. Desk-based workers valued remote and hybrid work very highly, while deskless workers sought flexibility in shift schedules, adequate time off when needed, and most importantly a culture that is supportive of family life.

Importantly, family extends beyond dependent children and includes parents, in-laws, and other extended family. The existence of policies that allow for flexibility is not enough – they must be accompanied by a supportive culture that allows those policies to be freely used.

**Good work environment/company culture:** Along with flexibility, a good work environment and culture was noted as the most important element of the value proposition. Participants value a work environment characterized by feelings of belonging, teamwork, and a “family-type” environment. The ability to be heard, have your opinion valued, and “be yourself” at work is important. Relationships are key to creating a good work environment.

Participants also valued a company culture where their contributions and hard work are recognized for their own sake. Some expressed a feeling that advancement in companies is often the result of something other than merit and hard work, claiming the ones who are “liked” or “play the game” are often the ones who get ahead. Many felt ill equipped to engage in what they viewed as such “self-promoting” behavior required for success in a corporate environment.

**Good benefits:** Health care is important, especially for those in lower wage jobs, as well as older workers and those with families. Some participants noted that while their company offered good health care, many colleagues couldn’t afford to enroll.

Many felt that companies generally do not do a good job explaining how health care benefits work. As a result, when employees have to use them and are faced with a high cost (due to a high deductible plan, for example) it’s a negative surprise. Some indicated that materials are still not available in Spanish.

environment/company culture, and good benefits. We also asked participants to identify any other aspect of the employment relationship important to them that was not captured in the four broad categories.

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## The Voice of the Latino Worker

Our discussions revealed that when it comes to the employment value proposition, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Latinos place the highest value on work environments where all aspects of the value proposition are working together to make a positive contribution to their experience. Similar to their colleagues of other backgrounds, they look at the components of the employment relationship as an integrated whole, recognizing that each one mutually reinforces the others to create an environment that works. Notably, when any one element in the value proposition begins to fall short of their needs, their satisfaction with their work life and connection to their employer begins to weaken.

While no single element alone determines the quality of the Latino experience at work, participants in our Listening Sessions most often cited the work environment/company culture as the most important

facet of the employment value proposition. A good work environment is one where Latinos feel a sense of belonging, are welcomed, and are valued. Many stated that the ability to feel free to “be yourself” at work is important – and that often means being outgoing, celebrating events at work, and creating a family-like supportive environment with coworkers. One participant felt she had finally found a home at her current company, describing it as “an environment where I no longer feel like I have to straighten my

**“I take a 360-degree view. it’s not one thing, but everything. And if any are out of balance is when I start thinking whether or not I need to be thinking of something different.”**

hair to fit in. I can be my true self.” This pressure to conform to behavioral norms in order to advance was noted as a problem in work sites located in areas of the US without large Latino populations.

Several workers in our sessions noted it was important to work for a company that they were proud to represent. One Latina noted how her company’s products were always “in the cupboard in my abuela’s house,” and others had recommended their companies as a good place to work to family members and close friends.

Many also felt there was a connection between the work environment and flexibility, stating that it was not only important to have policies that allowed for flexibility, but a culture and work environment that supported employees when they used those policies to create their desired level of work-life balance. Flexibility was noted as an essential tool in helping “make work fit into my life.” Most often, this meant allowing workers – especially Latinas – the ability

**“We like to recruit people of color, but we like to recruit people of color that look the same and have the same accent. I’m consciously thinking about how do I conform to advance – but also remaining true to myself. Can I truly be myself?”**

to meet their family obligations while also meeting the demands of their jobs. And family goes beyond a worker’s own children; it includes parents, in-laws, and other extended family. One Latina noted that the flexibility offered by remote work helped her fulfill her responsibility of taking her in-laws to appointments – because they don’t speak English, her presence is essential in helping them navigate a range of services and life events.

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## The Voice of the Latino Worker

*Good pay* was noted as the most important element in some of the Listening Sessions, and was characterized as a livable wage, enough to provide for family, achieve security and to meet life goals. Transparency in how pay is determined is important, as pay is viewed as a sign of recognition – and is a strong contributor to whether Latinos feel valued in the workplace.

*Good benefits* were rated by many workers in lower-wage jobs as one of the most important elements of choosing where to work. Both healthcare and paid time off are important to helping Latinos fulfill their roles in their families. Many cited the complex nature of health care plans as an obstacle, noting that better communications were needed – including translations of plan materials and tools into Spanish.

**“Pay is a support to the other factors that allows me to provide for my family. You’ll never be the highest paid here, and I feel that I’m underpaid but I love my people, I love my community, and I don’t have to worry about my company being in the newspaper, and there’s little risk of me not being able to provide for my family.”**

### The Latino Experience at Work

In many ways, Latinos value similar things in the employment relationship as other racial and ethnic groups. A supportive work environment where they are free to be themselves, the flexibility to create the right balance among all aspects of their lives, and adequate compensation that allows them to provide for themselves and their families could describe the desires of workers everywhere. So, what is it – if anything – that makes Latino workers different?

Our conversations confirmed that while Latinos share much in common with the rest of the American workforce, there are core elements of Latino culture that influence their attitudes toward work, their experience in the modern organization, and most importantly, how employers can create a workplace where this emerging workforce can thrive.

*“What I like about working at Hyatt is the fact that you’re able to grow at any pace that you want. It just depends on how fast you want to grow and the hard work you put into it.”*

**Jose Benitez**  
*Assistant Security and Safety Manager, Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego, Hyatt Hotels Corporation*



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## The Voice of the Latino Worker

### The Latino Experience at Work

#### **Familia**

The key cultural value of *familia* (family) and the role of parents have a significant impact on how Latinos relate to work, the workplace, and their coworkers. These values shape their attitudes, motivations, and behaviors in the professional sphere.

The workers we spoke to all agreed that family comes first and is the central focus of life. They prioritize the well-being and support of their family members above all else. In this context, work is a means to provide for the family and contribute to its welfare. The ability to support their loved ones and create a better future for their families is an immense source of pride for the Latino worker. Success is viewed in the context of how a career improves the quality of family life, not the individual's alone.

Latinos have a deep appreciation for the sacrifices made by their parents to provide them with opportunities and have a strong desire to honor and make them proud. This recognition of parental sacrifice is one of the driving forces behind the "Latino work ethic," motivating many to achieve success in their careers. In some ways, professional accomplishments are a way to repay the efforts of parents and ensure a better future for themselves and their families.

**"I am my parents' retirement plan."**

The value that Latinos place on familial bonds underlies the importance they place on flexibility in their working arrangements. Workers value flexibility not for its own sake, but for how it helps them fulfill their obligations to their families

and be in close proximity to their loved ones – both in times of need and celebration. Remote workers noted the value of being able to work from a different location (within the US and in their countries of origin), allowing them to help a family member in need or participate in the often lengthy celebration of holidays and family milestones.

The primacy of *familia* creates a strong sense of purpose and motivation in Latino workers, shaping their work ethic, commitment to their jobs, and relationships with coworkers. They often approach their work with a sense of responsibility, striving to succeed not only for themselves but also for their families and the honor of their parents' sacrifices. The desire to provide for and remain connected to their families is a driving force that influences their decisions and priorities in the workplace.

*"My dad taught me that no matter where you are and what kind of position you're in, you're empowered and more importantly you own what you're doing."*

**Mauricio Miranda**  
Assistant Store Manager, Fairmount  
Avenue Home Depot #6634  
The Home Depot



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## The Voice of the Latino Worker

### The Latino Experience at Work

#### Relationships

For Latinos, establishing relationships at work is a high priority, and they value a work environment where they can connect with coworkers on a personal level. In many cases, coworkers are viewed as an extended family, and relationships characterized by high levels of trust are common. This trust is seen as crucial for creating an environment of direct communication, which is considered a sign of respect in the working relationship.

A good example of the valued trusting relationship at work is that of the mentor. Many Latinos interviewed spoke with great respect and fondness about a mentor in their past, someone who went out of their way to “show them the ropes” and help them understand how to navigate specific situations, organizational politics, and career choices.

This is often critical for Latino employees, since many have nothing in their upbringing that connects them with or prepares them for the modern corporate workplace.

**“One of the biggest issues I’ve had as a Latino in America is having proper support. My parents don’t speak English, and they didn’t experience American schools or corporate work...so they don’t have the right tools to support me.”**

Those who have experienced the positive influence of a mentor view it as their responsibility to “pay it forward” and mentor

others. This is the case even with relatively younger Latinos, who actively seek to build relationships with coworkers who are just entering the workforce. They view it as their way of honoring those who mentored them.

The importance of relationships at work also influences how Latinos view career advancement. When the Latinos we spoke with talked about moving up in the corporate world, they emphasized the importance of relationships, networks, and being “liked” by the right people. These relationships were perceived by Latinos as more important to the organization than a person’s performance, achievements, or, notably, level of effort.

*“As Latinos, it is important for us to consider working for large companies.”*

**Gabriela Vasquez**  
Customer Experience Journey  
Architect, Florida Power & Light  
Company, Principal Subsidiary of  
NextEra Energy Inc.



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# The Voice of the Latino Worker

## The Latino Experience at Work

### Hard Work

One of the most significant cultural values influencing Latino behavior in the workplace is the importance placed on hard work. The “Latino work ethic” manifests itself as a willingness to put in the effort required to overcome nearly any obstacle or setback, a commitment based in the belief that any challenge can be met if the effort is made.

This work ethic can appear as evidence of a high level of commitment and loyalty to the company – and that is often the case. When Latinos are happy with the overall employment value proposition, the hard work is done willingly and with positivity. Engaged Latinos are committed to fulfilling their responsibilities and meeting expectations, even going above and beyond what is required.

Latino workers will work hard even when they are not happy at work. Because work is a central

tenet of Latino culture, it often results in employees doing what is asked, going above and beyond, and seemingly willingly taking on additional tasks and responsibilities without demanding anything in return.

Latinos believe that their work should speak for itself, and that hard work is intrinsically worthy

**“So long as you get a job and you get paid what’s being offered, then you’re saying to yourself, ‘Look, I’m going to work as hard as possible. Let them know I’m here. Let them know I’m valuable. And hopefully, I’ll be able to get the pay that I deserve.”**

of recognition. As a result, they struggle to understand when the value of their work is not recognized. When faced with this disconnect, Latinos will often work even harder, in the hope that eventually they will be recognized. They do not believe they should have to “self-promote” or “self advocate” to get their accomplishments noticed.

If their work is not recognized, rather than speak out, some Latinos simply “check out” – becoming disillusioned about the system and feeling disconnected from the workplace. This fuels the belief that companies aren’t interested in meritocracy – that those who are “liked” are the ones who are rewarded, at the expense of those who actually do the work.

**“The company will take what you want to give them. As Latinos, our way of giving and feeling like we have to prove ourselves, always willing, always open – that’s how we are. There’s a point where we have to say no. There are times when people are new and have to develop their brands and they don’t say no, and they just keep going and going and then there is burn out.”**

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## The Voice of the Latino Worker

### The Latino Experience at Work

The work ethic exists alongside and supports a belief in meritocracy – that Latinos are only asking for a chance to compete and earn their way. There is no desire for special treatment or accommodations not given to others; Latinos just want a chance to compete and be fairly judged on the results of their work.

**“I’m first generation and I worked really hard to get where I am. My husband calls me a workaholic. Part of it is to make my parents proud but the other part is just that nothing was handed to me. I’m worth it. I deserve to be here, and I will work to make sure I prove it to you.”**

#### The unique challenge faced by Latinas

Women are at the center of the Latino family structure. Even more so than their male counterparts, Latinas are expected to put family ahead of all other considerations, including work and career. And family is not limited to one’s own spouse and children. A Latina is often the primary caregiver for both her parents as well as her in-laws as they deal with the challenges of aging.

These family obligations can create tension between work and home life. And this applies not only to Latinas in professional or white-collar roles. Latinas in hourly jobs (often in the service industry) are challenged to balance their shift work schedules with a parent’s health care appointment or their role as English-speaking translators for an elderly relative at any number of service providers. Across the employment spectrum, a Latina’s desire to advance her work life

while simultaneously meeting the expectations of her family is a constant challenge.

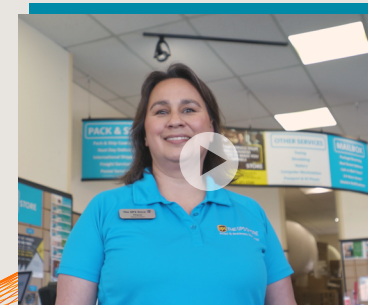
This dilemma is especially difficult for first generation Latinas. Faced with the primary responsibility of caring for the home and children, and away from the infrastructure of family support systems to share in the burdens of childcare, Latinas noted the importance of flexibility in work arrangements – specifically, the availability of remote work and flexible schedules – as essential to keeping them in the workforce. Despite gaining ground before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Latina workforce participation rate remains the lowest of all racial, ethnic and gender groups.

Finally, even if a Latina is fortunate to have a job that allows her the flexibility she needs to be physically present when and where needed, cultural expectations of her role can create pressure to keep her from appearing to take her work too

seriously, to the detriment of her family. This creates an incentive for Latinas to downplay their roles at work, in order to keep the peace at home.

*“Work ethic was instilled in me; not realizing it was a cultural thing, a gender thing, it’s just what I grew up with.”*

**Diane Evans**  
Owner, UPS Stores 5262 and 4144  
United Parcel Service, Inc.





# 16 The Path Forward

## Winning the New War for Talent

America is facing an unprecedented demographic transformation – a shift of such significance that it is changing the face of our social institutions, our electorate, and our workplaces. This change is being driven by America’s Latinos. Entering the labor force in ever larger numbers, this workforce brings a strong work ethic and a passion for creating collaborative, trusting relationships to the workplace, all in service to the goal of creating a better life for their families and themselves. They’re looking for opportunity, not special treatment – fueled by a belief that their ability to work long and hard under difficult conditions will earn them a chance at the American dream.

This emerging labor force presents significant opportunities – and challenges – for America’s employers. Latinos are hardworking and passionate – but many are also under-educated, lack the skills needed for a technology economy, and

have little in their life experience that prepares them to succeed in large, often impersonal organizations. But given their sheer numbers, companies who figure out how to win with Latino workers will win the new war for talent.

Our conversations over the past six months yielded fascinating insights into how Latino workers are similar to their colleagues of other ethnicities and shed light on how unique aspects of Latino culture influence their workplace experience. Based on these insights, we offer six recommendations for companies to consider as they develop talent strategies for a changing workforce. We consider this a starting point for discussion – and welcome the contributions of others who wish to study this important topic.



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**ONE:** To engage the growing Latino workforce, employers will need to adapt and expand traditional approaches to diversity and inclusion.

*The “post-Harvard” environment provides opportunities to reimagine how companies create diverse, inclusive workplaces.*

While the Supreme Court’s June 2023 decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* was limited to the question of race-based admissions in college education, both supporters and critics of the decision believe that similar challenges addressing the use of race in employment decisions are likely. In the aftermath of the decision, companies are evaluating their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion – and more specifically, how those aspirations are translated into actions. Many are reaffirming their view that diversity is both a benefit to their business and

consistent with their values, but are considering changes to the specific ways in which their beliefs translate into action in hiring, promotion, and other employment decisions.

This re-examination of corporate diversity initiatives provides an opportunity for companies to take a new look at how they approach this work. America has traditionally viewed race through the lens of a “minority (black) / majority (white)” paradigm; the growth of the Latino community over the past half century suggests that framing the issue in binary terms will no longer be sufficient to explain how 21st century Americans relate to each other. As illustrated in the Voices section of this report, the Latino experience in the workplace is

unique – as are the experiences of other racial and ethnic groups.

To truly leverage the potential of an increasingly diverse workforce, companies will need to do the hard work required to gain a deeper understanding of how the values, experiences and desires of each group impact their attitudes, behavior, and experiences at work. This will require finding the right balance between understanding individual identities while recognizing the dramatic changes taking place among the larger communities in our society. While no community – including Latinos – is monolithic, each group shares common experiences and values that we need to understand, while acknowledging the individual persons within each community.

Companies will also need to examine and acknowledge not only the limitations of the traditional minority-majority racial paradigm, but also the nuances of the relationships between the groups that comprise the non-White segment of the workforce – often referred to as “people of color.” Managing a multiethnic, multicultural workforce requires the acknowledgement that tensions exist not only between

the majority and minority groups, but between minority groups as well. The surfacing in late 2022 of racist and homophobic comments directed against Blacks by Latino members of the Los Angeles City Council is one example of the longstanding tensions between the two groups in southern California.

One opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of how race and ethnicity influence the experience at work is by unlocking the potential of Employee Resource Groups. The overwhelming majority of the workers we spoke with during this project engaged with us through their company’s Latino ERG. They viewed the group as a place of belonging in an often impersonal large organization, a place where the Latino desire to build relationships can be fulfilled. Members of an ERG can provide companies with valuable insight into how a group’s culture influences their attitudes, behaviors, and experiences in the workplace. They can also help build an understanding of shared values and aspirations across the workforce, which can form the foundation for building more inclusive workplaces.

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**TWO:** Employers will need to adapt to a workplace that is becoming society's primary source of interaction between people from different racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups.

**Concurrent with the demographic shift towards a minority-majority country, America is experiencing an increasing "self-sorting" into groups with similar backgrounds, viewpoints, and ideologies.**

From those we consider friends, to the partners we marry, the media we consume, the schools our children attend, and the neighborhoods, cities, and states in which we decide to live, Americans are increasingly choosing to spend their time with people who are like them, who believe what they believe and share their values.

The workplace is the last major institution where the ability to self-sort is limited. In choosing where to work, we can't always seek out those who look, think and act like we do.

Workplaces, especially those of large employers, continue to be populated by individuals from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and ideologies. In fact, creating diverse and inclusive workforces has been a stated objective for most large companies for many years, and many believe progress toward the goal has not been fast enough.

Employers will need to navigate emerging tensions in the workplace as social and political issues that divide Americans make their way into the day-to-day interactions among workers – or are forced upon them by actions of stakeholders on both sides of the "woke/anti-woke" debate. Some will approach this challenge by seeking to unite workers around the company's common purpose and focus on the work to be done, choosing not to engage on social or

political issues that have no direct impact on their business. Others, citing the importance of these issues to their workers and their increasing willingness to give voice to their views, will choose to create opportunities to engage in discussions inside their organizations. And a few, believing in a more expansive role of the corporation, will take public positions on social or political issues that may have no direct link to their immediate business interests.

While Latinos often have strong personal views on many of these social and political debates, most of the workers we spoke with did not want their companies to take public positions on issues not related to their business. Although they felt it was not the role of the employer to engage publicly on these issues, they did believe it was important that their company

acknowledge its commitment to diversity, inclusion, and fairness in the workplace. Importantly, they want their companies to provide the opportunity for employees to discuss these issues internally – or to refrain from doing so – without the risk of negative consequences to their standing at work.



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## The Path Forward

**THREE:** Large companies need to address the fact that they are not relatable to many Latino workers.

***Employers have what Latino workers want – but they need to invest in building relationships with these communities before their stories can be heard.***

One of the most significant advantages that large companies have is the strong alignment between their employment value proposition and the desires of Latino workers. Because work is primarily a means to provide a better life for one's family, companies that offer stability, flexibility, interesting coworkers, welcoming workplaces, and a higher level of financial security than other segments of the economy have a compelling offer to make. The problem is that many Latinos have no frame of reference for what it is like to work in large corporations, and may see them as impersonal or unrelatable, with the prospect of employment considered out of reach.

Most of the workers we spoke with felt it was important that their company be a place that they would readily recommend to family and close friends as a good place to work. Some of those who worked in consumer-facing companies also noted how family and friends with a strong connection to their products felt a sense of pride that they knew someone who worked for the company. But for companies without a strong brand presence among Latino consumers, becoming relevant as an employer will require an investment of time and effort.

In crafting these outreach strategies, employers can gain valuable insights from the experience of the higher education system in California following the passage of Proposition 209 in 1996. Proposition 209 prohibited the use of race, ethnicity, national origin, or gender in public

employment, contracting and education in the nation's most populous – and one of its most diverse – states.

Enrollment of Latinos and Blacks at the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems plummeted in the years following the passage of Proposition 209. In response, both experimented with a variety of race-neutral and outreach programs designed to aggressively recruit diverse students. After 25 years, the CSU system enrollment nearly fully reflects the state's diversity; and while the more selective UC system has not yet achieved that goal, substantial progress has been made. Black and Latino students represented 43% of Californians in the UC system's fall 2022 incoming class, on par with their 44% of the state's population.

One of the most successful efforts has been at UCLA, which uses an "intrusive recruiting" approach to pursue applicants as aggressively as college coaches pursue star athletes. This includes efforts

such as collaborative partnerships with local schools and churches, presence at community events and text-based outreach programs for teenagers that help them prepare for college. The significant investment in these intensive efforts is intended to raise the profile of the university in the community and connect with prospective students well before they graduate from high school.

Large employers are well positioned to be the pathway to the American dream for Latino workers. Creating a presence in the Latino community – through marketing, corporate social responsibility, and employment activities – is a first step to making that vision a reality.

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**FOUR:** Companies should design talent strategies that are built on an understanding of how the values of familia, relationships, and hard work shape Latino attitudes and behavior in the workplace.

## **Flexibility is key**

Like other employees, Latinos value jobs that make it easy for them to fit work into their lives. Because *familia* is the motivating force behind the Latino worker's desire for flexibility, the specific solutions look different depending on the circumstance. A Latina mom may need the ability to adjust her work schedules on short notice, so she can care for small children, or look after the needs of aging parents and in-laws. A first-generation immigrant starting out after college might prioritize finding a job that allows remote work so he can return for milestone events in his home country. A Latino father may seek out a workplace culture where coworkers cover shifts for each other so that each can attend important family events.

And a high school graduate with aspirations for a better life may need a manager who restructures her role so she can complete the last class she needs to finish her college degree.

The workers we spoke to credited their companies for having written policies that encouraged flexibility, and were quick to point out the importance of workplace culture in making sure the intent matched reality. For example, they credited both managers and coworkers for creating an environment where they felt comfortable leaving early for a child's school event, knowing they wouldn't face disapproval or resentment when they returned. These supportive environments they described worked because of a strong commitment to reciprocity – that you willingly

contribute to cover for a coworker who needs to attend to a family issue, because you know they will do the same for you.

Since most Latinos don't work in desk-based jobs, flexibility means more than the ability to work remotely. Creative approaches are needed to identify how to give workers more control over when and how work gets done. How are shift schedules determined? Is emergency/backup dependent care help available? Do part-time roles offer a path to full-time employment, or are they "dead end" jobs? Is there training that will allow workers to compete for higher-level jobs – and are they provided in Spanish? While most Latinos speak English, it is a second language for many and they may learn more effectively in Spanish.

Because of their role as family caregivers, flexibility is especially important for Latinas. Latino caregivers spend more time per week providing care than non-Latinos, and nearly three quarters of Latino caregivers are women. Importantly, while

Latinos are more likely to be in intensive care-giving situations than non-Latinos, they are less likely to consider their caregiving responsibilities stressful. Caring for family members is a central role that is expected in Latino culture – and failure to accept that responsibility is viewed negatively. In addition to providing programs that provide financial support for "outsourced" caregiving, companies should also consider how they can make it easier for Latinas to fulfill both their job responsibilities and their caregiving roles.

A worker-centric view of making work fit into life will yield results that benefit all workers, not just Latinos. But by making it easier for Latinos to fulfill their primary obligation to the *familia*, companies can drive greater retention and higher engagement.

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## The Path Forward

### ***Health care is a concern for many***

The employees we spoke with did not generally list benefits as the most important element of the employment value proposition. However, health care is a major concern for workers in lower income jobs. Many of these workers felt that the benefits they received as part of their employment were the most important factor in deciding where to work, providing security and allowing them to care for their families. One participant also noted that having access to good benefits was rare among the Latinos in his community – most did not work for large organizations and did not have access to coverage. In 2021, 19% of Latinos were uninsured, a rate 2.5 times higher than that of Whites and 1.75 times higher than that of Blacks.

Offering robust health care coverage is an advantage in attracting and retaining Latino

workers; however, employers have an opportunity to drive greater understanding of these benefits, and ensure they are being used in the most efficient and appropriate way. At a minimum, benefits communications should be provided in Spanish. Health care coverage is complex – and understanding is enhanced when communications are in a worker's native language.

An even more significant opportunity to engage Latino workers is for employers to use health plan data to identify how elements of the plan are performing across different ethnic or racial groups – for example, are Latinos using high quality providers at the same rate as others? Health care data can illuminate differences in prevalence of disease among groups, insights which can be used to direct tailored communications strategies and other interventions. Similarly, differences in behaviors that may be due to cultural factors (such

as reluctance to seek certain types of preventive care) can be addressed through campaigns that are culturally appropriate. Finally, companies need to continue to seek innovative ways to address the affordability issue in health care, which may include experimenting with new approaches – such as “dependent only” option for coverage (allowing an employee who can't afford to cover him or herself an option to cover a dependent child).

### ***Relationships are critical to learning organizational norms***

Because little in their experience has prepared them for life inside a modern corporation, many Latinos enter the workforce unfamiliar with the norms of life in a large, structured organization. Several of the workers interviewed spoke with great respect about how a mentor had helped guide them in making decisions or navigating difficult situations, especially early in their careers.

These close relationships are critical to helping Latinos learn a company's culture, history and norms, and organizations who encourage them are likely to reap the benefits of higher engagement and ultimately better performance. Importantly, Latinos who have had the benefit of a more senior mentor often desire to become mentors themselves as a way to honor those who helped them. Mentorship – both formal and informal – leverages the value Latinos place on relationships and helps them build the skills needed to thrive and advance in the organization.

# 22 The Path Forward

## ***The Latino work ethic is a double-edged sword***

For Latinos, work is the path to security and a good life for the family. They seek opportunities, not special treatment, fueled by the knowledge that they will do whatever it takes to get the job done and the belief that rewards will follow. This work ethic is an extremely valuable and attractive characteristic for prospective employers – to a point. The Latino focus on hard work can also have consequences that, over time, undermine their long-term engagement with their organizations.

Because the Latino worker believes that hard work will ultimately be rewarded, unrecognized effort may initially lead him to work even harder in an attempt to prove his worth. Should the cycle continue, however, he can become disillusioned and lose faith in the fairness of the system. He may begin to question his

company's stated philosophy of rewarding performance – because, for Latinos, hard work **is** performance.

Companies should encourage managers to cultivate a workplace culture that acknowledges the value of hard work and recognizes the efforts of those who consistently volunteer for assignments, help their coworkers, and go “above and beyond” to get the job done. They should also make sure that the relationship between effort, results and rewards is clear. In addition to providing clarity on the “written” rules of the game, companies can use mentors to help by coaching their colleagues on how to discern the “unwritten” keys to advancement in the organization – what it takes beyond simply working hard.

Often, one of those unwritten rules involves making sure one's

accomplishments are noticed by the right network of professional contacts. However, self-promotion is a behavior that is not generally embraced by Latino culture. Recognizing that this behavior is a necessary part of advancement in large organizations, companies can work with Latino ERGs to identify ways to help workers develop culturally appropriate approaches to this challenge. Helping Latinos build skills in this area can make a significant impact to better equip Latinos for success in the corporate world.



**Crystal Santana**  
*Director of Operations, Longhorn  
Steakhouse, Darden Restaurants, Inc.*

*“We are hardworking, caring, we’re going to put our best foot forward in everything we do. To understand that, you have to open up opportunities for people like me.”*

# 23 The Path Forward

## **FIVE:** Employers need innovative approaches to bridge the Latino education gap.

***Latino educational underachievement means the fastest growing segment of the available labor pool is ill-equipped for today's jobs, let alone those of the future. The burden of preparing those workers will fall to employers.***

Only three quarters of Latinos have completed high school, compared with over 90% of their non-Latino peers. Despite improvements in the past decade, Latinos have college completion rates below all other groups. This educational underachievement means an increasing segment of the available labor pool is ill-equipped for today's jobs, let alone those of the future, and the burden of preparing those workers will fall to employers. This is not a new development. According to *College is Just the Beginning*, in 2015 America's employers spent \$177 billion on

formal post-secondary education, and a staggering \$413 billion on informal, on-the-job training each year. The growing gap between workforce preparation and the jobs of the future will require a continued high level of investment.

Today, much of the employer investment is delivered through educational assistance programs, typically part of a comprehensive employee benefits package. But despite their widespread adoption by employers, only a fraction of employees take advantage of them. A recent study by InStride and Bain & Company found that while 80% of employees expressed interest in attending school while working, only 40% knew their employer offered educational assistance and only 2% took advantage of the benefit. The reason? Poor communication, complex administration and

typically requiring workers to pay tuition upfront and seek reimbursement after completion, something that is out of reach financially for most workers.

As currently structured, traditional educational assistance programs are not likely to be effective in closing the Latino education gap. Companies will need to create the conditions that allow workers to take advantage of the financial support offered by traditional programs. This includes addressing the cash flow challenge of the traditional reimbursement model, and developing new, more flexible work arrangements that help employees integrate their learning journey into their personal lives. This is especially important for Latino workers, for whom family obligations are often primary.





# 24

## The Path Forward

### **SIX:** Latinas are an untapped pool of future leadership talent.

***Despite real and perceived cultural barriers, Latinas are capable and prepared to assume leadership roles in America's companies.***

Although labor markets have become more favorable to employers following record low unemployment, talent shortages persist – especially when it comes to the skills needed to create an artificial intelligence-enabled world. Companies will also need leaders who can help organizations navigate the transformational change ahead. People will be at the center of that change. One of the enduring lessons of the pandemic is that no matter how much technology advances, our productive capability as a society will still depend on human beings.

Coming out of the pandemic, workers are demanding

something different from work, the workplace, and their bosses. They are looking for an environment where their needs and concerns are taken seriously. And if they aren't getting what they need, they are speaking up. Workers are resisting managers' demands to come back to the physical workplace – not because of concerns for their physical safety, but because they just don't want to go back to the way it was.

As an increasing number of Latinos enter the workforce, they bring with them the desire to be part of a work environment based on relationships – one characterized by close bonds with their coworkers amid a culture of collaboration and respect. This human-centered approach to work is well suited to the challenges of the post-pandemic workplace, and Latinos can play a key role in leading the change.

Because their college graduation rates outpace those of their male counterparts, Latinas will represent an important untapped pool of potential future leadership talent. They have demonstrated their leadership abilities by taking on leadership roles in the public sector and have achieved something their non-Latina peers have not – near-parity with their male counterparts. A 2022 study found that 43% of all Latino elected state legislators in the US were women – compared to 31% overall. This is compelling evidence that, contrary to cultural stereotypes, Latinas hold positions of authority and leadership within the community.

# 25 Conclusion

Latino workers are the future of the American workforce, and large companies have what they want – good jobs, working with great people, that will help them create their own path to the American dream. In an era where many are calling into question our country's commitment to the value and dignity of all people, it is more important than ever to do the hard work required to understand each other and truly turn our diversity into our strength. We hope this report makes a positive contribution to this effort.

For more information and resources, visit the Latino Worker Project webpage.

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## About the Authors

For over thirty years, **Mike Madrid** has been changing the outcomes of political campaigns throughout the country. Madrid is a nationally recognized expert on Latino demographics. In 2001, he was named as one of America's "Most Influential Hispanics" by *Hispanic Business Magazine*.

**Shelly Carlin** is Executive Vice President of HR Policy Association and its Center On Executive Compensation. She joined the Association in August 2014 from Motorola Solutions, where she was Senior Vice President, Human Resources and Communications.



**Mike Madrid**

Partner, GrassrootsLab  
Authoritative Voice on Latino Voting Behavior,  
Politicization and Socialization



**Michele Aguilar Carlin**

Executive Vice President  
HR Policy Association and Center On Executive  
Compensation

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