

Latino Immigrant Justice Movement Building in NC

A Convening of Immigrants, Activists, Advocates, and Allies April 26-27, 2014

CONVENING REPORT

On April 26 and 27, 2014, a diverse group of immigrants, activists, advocates, and allies in North Carolina's Latino Immigrant Justice Movement came together in Greensboro to talk about how to make the movement stronger.

This report shares information about how the convening was organized, how activities were designed, and the ideas that were discussed. We invite you to share it with others to keep the conversation going!

Thank you to the Planning Committee who shaped the convening and reached out to people all over North Carolina!

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PREPARATION

Before the convening

There's a lot more to a successful convening than bringing people together for a couple of days. Here are some of the steps that were taken in the nine months leading up to the convening:

- Creating a Planning Committee with representation from all parts of the state, rural and urban areas, and both nonprofit organizations and grassroots groups
- Contracting a language justice team to provide skilled translation and interpretation throughout the planning process and during the convening itself
- Learning from the challenges of past gatherings and convenings
- Conducting a Listening and Learning process: talking with more than 60 people in interviews and focus groups, to identify the strengths and challenges of the Latino immigrant rights movement, and opportunities for making it stronger
- Writing and distributing a Listening and Learning report to share those lessons
- Clarifying the overall purpose of the convening, then designing an agenda of activities that would help explore questions, spark discussions and build relationships
- Conducting inclusive yet targeted outreach, to make sure the convening included people from every part of the state and the whole spectrum of the immigrant justice movement

Design of the convening

Instead of bringing in outside experts to provide information, we designed the convening around popular education methods, and the wisdom and stories of the people who attended. The facilitators used a lot of different methods to engage people with different styles of learning and discussion:

- Storytelling, and finding patterns from hearing different stories
- Sharing learning through pictures and symbols as well as words
- Activities and conversations that built skills for listening, negotiating conflict, and “walking in someone else’s shoes.”
- Movement and human sculpture, to understand what happens in our bodies during moments of tension or conflict
- Small group dialogues facilitated, recorded and reported by leaders from the group
- Caucus conversations among people with a shared identity (i.e., those most affected by immigration issues, those less directly affected, and geographical region)
- Large group facilitated discussions to weave emerging threads
- A closing ritual that let each participant write down a commitment, which passed through every other person’s hands
- Time for celebration: a talent show, followed by dancing, on Saturday night. Making time for laughter, singing, poetry, jokes, stories and dancing helps us connect with each other in a deeper way and builds our capacity to face the challenges in our movement.

Making participation possible

Attending a two-day event always requires effort; we did everything we could to make the convening accessible to as many people as possible.

Skilled interpretation, so people could participate comfortably in English or Spanish

All materials, handouts, and outreach were in both Spanish and English

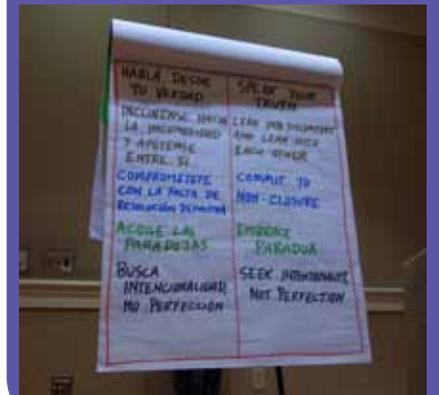
Making invitations by email, text, phone and face-to-face meetings

Scheduled on a weekend for less conflict with work schedules

Quality, bilingual child care provided

Meals and lodging provided

Travel expenses paid



LESSONS LEARNED

1. North Carolina's Latino immigrant justice movement is deeply rooted, diverse, and powerful.

Over the past 20 years, immigrants, activists, advocates, and allies have had real impact in their communities and throughout the state through their direct services, community organizing, advocacy, civil disobedience, civic participation, and cultural sharing. While the struggles are real, it is critical to acknowledge, honor, and celebrate the successes and gains from these collective efforts.

2. Beneath the challenging differences in politics and strategy, there is collective and personal investment in immigrant justice.

When people have opportunities to build relationships and share stories, it becomes more possible to lean into the differences and communicate with respect and integrity.

3. For the work to be inclusive and equitable, organizations and communities need resources and support.

At the heart of the movement are primarily Spanish-speaking immigrant communities of mixed immigration status who must negotiate the day-to-day injustices this movement is working to address. For these most affected to bring their leadership to strategy and decision-making, organizers need to proactively create more just and inclusive spaces within the movement (considering language justice, transportation, meeting times, child care, technological divides, etc.). While there are efforts to account for these challenges, they are typically under-resourced, at best. Real equity requires the equitable investment of real resources.



4. Leadership in the immigrant justice movement should be developed with a power analysis.

A lot of support for leadership in the movement occurs through the nonprofit sector. This can lead to exclusion of those most affected by their immigration status, limited access to formal education, or lack of work authorization. Grassroots leaders directly affected by the injustices of the current immigration system find themselves struggling for access, resources, recognition, and voice. The movement as a whole would benefit from re-defining leadership and upholding diverse leaders across immigration status, position and role, and generation

LESSONS LEARNED, Cont.

5. Communication and convening is critical to the movement.

The Latino immigrant justice movement is a locally, regionally, and nationally responsive effort that engages thousands in North Carolina. Currently, there is a communication gap that leaves many unaware of the work people and organizations are leading around the state. Participants at the convening were excited to connect with each other and eager for more opportunities to strengthen these connections through future regional and statewide convenings, and they called for a centralized clearinghouse of leaders' and organizations' contact information and resources from all of North Carolina.

6. Strong movement building work requires long-term and sustainable infrastructure.

Over the years, there have been many successful examples of effective collaboration, emerging infrastructure, and intentional coalition building. Campaigns for immigration reform, in-state tuition, and worker rights (to name a few) have gone on for decades with limited and occasional funding, resourced by organizations already stretched beyond their limit and staff working above and beyond their regular hours. This piecemeal approach has kept many of these efforts going. However, there have also been difficult compromises made around inclusion, equity, and leadership as a result. People are eager to continue working together and could be much more effective and inclusive in their efforts with a more sustainable structure.



MOVING FORWARD, Cont.

What funders can do

- Support partnerships and collaborations over the long-term, as well as individual organizations.
- Increase funding for organizing and advocacy, as well as services.
- Support grassroots work that doesn't happen in traditional nonprofits, or provide extra, flexible grant funding that 501(c)(3) nonprofits can pass on to unincorporated, grassroots groups.
- Promote and model language justice in your own communications and in the work grantees do.
- Advocate for other funders to invest in immigrant justice.
- Support a directory of organizations and groups in North Carolina with descriptions of their work, shared tools and resources, and a calendar of events from around the state.
- Support local and/or regional convenings over the next year that include: 1) intentional outreach and recruitment of diverse leadership voices; 2) language justice through skilled translation and interpretation; and 3) acknowledgement and honoring of the diversity within the movement.

What we can do together

- Talk with each other about how to collaborate on some of these big ideas, like creating a statewide directory or organizing regional convenings.
- Build momentum for a larger, statewide convening organized by people and groups in the movement, and resourced by foundations.
- Remember to keep working on relationship, communication, and celebration, as well as plans and strategies.

