



Workshop for the Guatemalan Community in Florida

In continuation of the Center for International Migration and Integration's ongoing coordination of Guatemala-Diaspora partnership workshops and in follow up to its most recent workshop in July 2010, CIMI held a workshop on Sunday, September 18th, 2011, 10am-4pm, at El Sol, Jupiter's Neighborhood Resource Center, with interested partners and stakeholders. This interactive workshop aimed to address the Diaspora community's most pressing needs here in the United States, while still taking into account the community's ties to Guatemala and how those ties shape their identity in the US.

Background:



Since 2007, the Center for International Migration and Integration (CIMI) has developed and carried out a total of seven workshops, including this workshop on community needs and integration for the Guatemalan Community in Florida. This followed another workshop in 2010 in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. The two workshops shared the overall goal of strengthening Guatemalan Diaspora's organizational capacity and projects, while fostering a sense of community among these Diaspora members.

As CIMI began to plan the 2011 workshop, our organizational partners in Florida alerted us to the acute need for a partial shift in focus to domestic issues confronting the Guatemalan Diaspora. CIMI recognizes the importance of the Diaspora's wellbeing and relative integration in its country of destination, more or less as a precondition to successful transnational development projects. Accordingly, CIMI used this recent follow-up workshop as an opportunity to address the participants' most pressing needs – integration, education, and community engagement - with an eye for how these issues affect the Diaspora's long-term development project goals in Guatemala.

Participants: A total of thirty-three people participated in CIMI's daylong workshop in Jupiter, Florida. The participants included 18 Diaspora representatives, as well as representatives of El Sol, Jupiter's Neighborhood Resource Center, the local school district, the general consul and her associates, and several additional community partners, who work with the Guatemalan community and have been involved in CIMI's work in years past.

Summary:

The workshop combined interactive workshop activities, panel presentations, group discussion, and intensive working group sessions focused on three themes: needs and priorities assessment; social and educational integration challenges; and strategies to engage community members. Aileen Josephs, immigration attorney and Honorary Consul of Guatemala in West Palm Beach, and Kate Berson, CIMI representative, introduced the workshop and prior Guatemala-Diaspora partnership work. The workshop sessions were as follows:

Community Needs and Priorities

Ruby Ortiz, Director of Florida Institute of Management, Management Professor at Florida International University, and trainer and consultant in Florida and Latin America, led an interactive workshop on community needs and priorities assessment. This session gave the group the opportunity to consider and assess the challenges they are facing and the resources available to them to address those challenges. Ruby facilitated a discussion on leadership, an open forum for participants to list the needs they see in their community, and then an activity in small groups for which participants had to express their group's top priority through images, a strategy to have them think about these priorities in a new and creative way as a group. The needs expressed included:

- Civic education
- Security
- General education
- Access to information on health
- Youth involvement and investment in youth
- The creation of community
- AIDS prevention
- Medical insurance
- Translation of important documents
- Social activities
- Support to parents
- Individual self-esteem and motivation
- Literacy
- Integration
- Economic difficulty



Challenges of Integration in the Guatemalan Community

Connie Berry, President of the Caridad Center and Director of the Multicultural Department of Palm Beach School District, and Don Antonio Silvestre, Education Specialist at Hope Rural School in Indiantown, presented about their experience with multicultural education

and integration challenges in Palm Beach and Martin County, especially in the context of relationships between parents, children, and schools. These relationships have been recognized as one of the Diaspora community's top priorities. The panel and discussion were goals oriented, incorporating best practices for integration of Guatemalan – particularly Mayan – youth and their parents; maintaining Mayan languages and identity among Guatemalan youth, and effective communication between youth and their parents regarding the children's education. Connie and Don Antonio's presentations encouraged an open dialogue in which participants voiced the issues with which they have been confronted – as specific as language options on school forms and which box to check and as broad as the importance of youth and parents having pride in their cultural identity.

Findings from the session included:

- Several community leaders have held meetings with parents, bringing in professionals to speak of the importance of education;
- In order to attain proficiency and a rich vocabulary in English, it is important that children to acquire a rich vocabulary in their native language. This requires that they speak this language in their home and are proud of their language;
- Discrimination and negative vocabulary against Mayan children lowers their self-esteem and discourages them from speaking their language, learning about their history and ancestors, and participating in their culture;
- Outreach to community members about school registration is helpful to make sure parents have access to the information they need;
- There should be a lot of emphasis on and positive association with education in the home; children need to feel that their educational achievements are valuable in order for them to do well and not drop out;
- In order for Mayan languages to be counted and to increase the chance that the school system will address school children's linguistic needs, Mayan families should not check off "Spanish" as their language, but rather "Other" and then list their particular language;
- One participant suggested that if the parents check "Non-Hispanic," then there should be a secondary survey or form for them to fill out, which includes: which country they are from, which language(s) their mother and father speak, which is the primary language spoken in the home, and what are the ages of all of the children in the home.
- There are scholarships and other educational resources in the United States that Guatemalan families can take advantage of.



Engaging the Community through Social Media
 Amilcar Rivera Viemann and Roberto Monjaras presented their texting campaigns with Comité del Barrio, a community group in Lakeworth. They have used texting to alert their community about raids and

deportation, as well as to inform them of certain laws and regulations in the United States that they may not be familiar with. Brett Sandala, Social Media Editor at Newsmax Media in West Palm Beach shared with participants how people can use social networking technology in their work and why it is an important tool. He spoke about Facebook and Twitter as ways to market organizations' work and get more people involved. Brett and Inbal Mazar, PhD candidate at Florida Atlantic University, led breakout sessions, in which they worked one-on-one with participants to set up email and Facebook accounts or, if they already had accounts, learned how to use more aspects of email and Facebook.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Ruby Ortiz led a final session on next steps. The group split into smaller groups to brainstorm ideas and then presented to the larger group, for example:

- Find other means to help the community, for example with medical or legal assistance and information;
- Get more people involved in the work that is already being carried out;
- Conduct more workshops for the youth in the community;
- Promote the formation of volunteer groups in the community;
- Organize cultural events to share music, poetry, and food.

Impact:

The immediate impact of the 2011 workshop includes:

- Participants went through a step-by-step process of needs assessment in small groups and then as a large group, identifying a wide range of needs in their community, including: the creation of a sense of community, civic education, access to information on health, parent support, literacy, investing in youth, and integration;
- Participants of diverse backgrounds and roles in the community engaged in problem-solving dialogue concerning education and integration challenges as well as community engagement and organizing challenges;
- Participants shared findings and best practices from their own experiences in the community: These ranged from problems as specific as how to fill out school registration forms properly so that speakers of any of 22 Mayan languages are accounted for and have the potential to be provided with a translator, to more universal issues such as parental involvement in children's education and the importance of developing strong native language skills in order to become more proficient and skilled in the Spanish and English languages.
- After a presentation and group conversation about the necessity and challenges of organizing the community, participants less experienced with the internet set up email and/or Facebook accounts, and participants more experienced with the internet became more well-versed in creating groups and



event invitations using Facebook. Participants will use these tools to reach out to their community for involvement in and support of projects, and also to alert their community about important issues in their local and home communities.

- Two community leaders shared information about their local group, Comité del Barrio, which uses text-messaging campaigns to reach out to community members, providing information about US laws with which the community may be unfamiliar, important upcoming events, and immigrants' rights. Several participants in attendance expressed interest in becoming involved in the Comité's work or even replicating the Comité in other areas.