



Latino Engagement Taskforce 2 of Commerce City

Comité de Involucramiento Latino 2 de Commerce City

Report and Recommendations to the City of Commerce City

Prepared by
Cultivando

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Colorado's third fastest growing city, Commerce City has taken the opportunity to be a leader in building a stronger and more inclusive community. But what exactly is an inclusive community? According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, an inclusive community checks many boxes such as:

1. Does everything that it can to respect all its citizens, gives them full access to resources, and promotes equal treatment and opportunity
2. Works to eliminate all forms of discrimination
3. Engages all its citizens in decision-- making processes that affect their lives
4. Values diversity
5. Responds quickly to racist and other discriminating incidents.

Over the last 3 years Commerce City has taken steps to do and be all of those things, and Cultivando and Latino Engagement Taskforce participants hope this report will support Commerce City to continue in these important endeavors.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2014, Commerce City was home to approximately 51,000 individuals. In the past years, Commerce City has experienced a significant increase of population from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and today Commerce City is one of the most diverse cities in the state of Colorado, one of very few with a majority non--white population. In 2014, Latinos comprised of 46% of the Commerce City population but this number has increased within the past 2 years and Commerce City will continue to see a growth of diverse community members, particularly Latinos. The majority of families in South Commerce City are of mixed-documentation status, meaning that one or more member of the household is waiting on legal documentation status. Additionally, Adams 14 School District reports that over 50% of parents in the district have limited English proficiency, some speaking little or no English. Documentation status and language barriers, and the fear and isolation that often accompany them, are serious barriers to participation, civic engagement, health, and inclusion for those families.

To assist Commerce City in building a stronger and more inclusive community, Cultivando was contracted to develop, support, and facilitate the Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET) in December 2015. The first LET followed an 8-month process to meet with, learn, and then make recommendations to City leadership. Those recommendations were submitted in July 2016, and City leadership has done a remarkable job to begin to implement many of the proposed activities, policies, and practices that LET 1 suggested.

In November 2017, Cultivando was again hired to coordinate and facilitate a second LET, with 13 new members, two members who participated in LET 1, and also with strategies to include and retain the expertise and momentum of other interested LET 1 participants. The composition of LET 2 consists of 15 Latina Commerce City community members, all of whom speak Spanish predominantly. LET members were committed to ensuring that the process by which we formed

our recommendations contained in this report was as important as the recommendations and the report itself. LET 2 consisted of 6 monthly meetings to meet with and learn from City staff. Meetings were two hours, facilitated in Spanish, and held at the City of Commerce City Civic Center, and Cultivando encouraged/expected regular attendance and participation of participants.

We are proud of what we have accomplished and submit to you the following recommendations for further strengthening Commerce City's goal to build a strong and more inclusive community. You will not that many of the recommendations are to continue to implement and support the important changes that the City has been working on since LET1:

- Continued improved language access
- Cultural events or including activities that celebrate Latino culture in existing events
- Continued improved rapport and community-building opportunities between Latino community and the Commerce City Police Department
- Continued engagement and communication between Commerce City and the Latino community
- Affordable housing strategies to protect families at-risk of displacement
- Co-development of park and community safety strategies with community members, Police Department and Parks and Rec staff.

INTRODUCTION

With funding from the city of Commerce City, Cultivando facilitated the second Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET2), which consisted of 15 Commerce City community members. The goal of LET2 was to obtain constructive and solution-focused participation on how Commerce City can better engage, involve, and meaningfully serve the Latino community. Commerce City leadership, driven by the City Manager Brian McBroom and City Council, recognize that many Latino community members do not participate, interact, and engage in city processes and programs at rates proportional to the population. A genuine commitment from city leadership to understand how to better work with and serve the Latino community in Commerce City created and drove this project.

The goals of the LET go far beyond simply informing the Latino community about city processes or informing the City about needs or concerns of the Latino community, but seeks to continue to open and deepen authentic communication and mutual understanding towards building a collaborative and a truly inclusive community. The recommendations seek to build meaningful access to needed services and a solutions-focused pathway forward towards greater civic engagement and positive participation in building a quality community for a lifetime in Commerce City for and with all community members.

Many cities and city governments throughout the United States struggle with the issues of inclusion and authentic engagement of diverse communities. Many well-documented systemic barriers and issues of cultural misunderstanding prevent and discourage participation from diverse community members. Building inclusive city processes takes time, commitment, and resources, and the recommendations put forth by LET2 are an important step towards achieving the goal for Commerce City. Commerce City's commitment to this work is admirable and the effort is a great example for cities across Colorado and beyond.

Throughout the 7 months, LET2 members met once a month to discuss and explore various city topics that were of interest to the task force. These topics included; city organizational overview, police department experiences, victim's services, and city-- sponsored events. Additional topics emerged from the monthly meetings, such as city water, park safety, stray animals, concerns with schools, etc. The objectives of the task force were to:

1. Identify issues/topics of interest to the Latino community in Commerce City
2. Document real and perceived barriers to participation in city activities and events
3. Recognize how Latinos within the city prefer to receive information
4. Determine the effectiveness of existing communication tools.

Flexibility was allowed throughout the task force to allow LET members to identify and guide the conversations and put forth the recommendations necessary to Commerce City.

WORK OF THE LATINO ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE

The Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET2) held its first meeting on December 1, 2016 in a conference room at the Commerce City Recreation Center. Subsequent meetings were held every second Thursday of each month thereafter from 11:00am - 1:00pm, and were hosted in alternating locations throughout Commerce City such as the Commerce City Civic Center and the Commerce City Recreation Center.

An application process was established to recruit interested Commerce City community members and with assistance from Community Enterprise staff Promotoras outreach efforts were conducted. A total of 21 applications were received and 15 individuals were selected through an internal Cultivando selection process to be a part of the Latino Engagement Taskforce. The LET members consisted of an all-female task force with an average of 15.2 years living in Commerce City, from a range of 2-22 years in Commerce City. Of the LET2 members, all 15 self-identified as Spanish being their primary language and 2 self-identified as being bilingual (English/Spanish).

To assist us in gathering baseline information, pre and post surveys were distributed to LET members to identify issues/topics of interest, obtain real and perceived barriers to participation, obtain information on how the Latino community prefers to receive information, and determine the effectiveness of current communication tools within Commerce City.

The monthly meetings were facilitated by Guadalupe Villalobos, Cultivando Promotora. In preparation for the meetings, Cultivando staff met twice a month to coordinate the logistics of the meetings (agendas, calls, ways of improvement, etc). The structure of the monthly meetings included a set agenda that allowed flexibility for different topics that were identified by the LET2 members. As with authentic and meaningful community outreach, the importance of allowing community members to lead the monthly conversations was of high importance to ensure Cultivando captured the stories and experiences.

Overviews of each month's meetings are highlighted below with general recommendations. Following, concrete and detailed recommendations and handouts that were shared with the LET members are included.

MONTHLY LET MEETING SUMMARIES

First LET meeting

On November 17, 2017, the first LET meeting Latino Engagement Taskforce was held in order to involve the Latino community in talking about the needs and barriers of access in the city of Commerce City. The goal, commitment and the process of the project were discussed and the response of the committee was immediate. Expressing their concerns and observations, as well as their post points. However, the most important thing is that some of the residents involved in

the project said that even though they have been living in the City of Commerce City for 15 years, they did not know how to get involved.

Points to be highlighted by the community are:

- High speeds in public and residential streets
 - Control of animals, specifically with the situation of feral cats.
 - Increase in rents, housing and trailer parks as well as electricity and water services
 - Problematic neighbors
 - Public lighting (Rosemary street)
 - Racism at work
 - Insecurity/lack of safety in parks and walking areas
 - Bad customer service experiences at motor vehicles (racism)
 - Communication barriers during traffic accidents "I had an accident and they blamed me for not speaking English"

The residents talked about the remarkable:

- Library
- Water park

A highlighted sentence was “We must know more about our rights ... that will give us more security.”

To conclude in the first meeting, they emphasized that residents seek to know more about their community, and how they can apply the knowledge learned. Limited information about institutions or how they work ... but they have much initiative to learn and apply the knowledge within their community.

Meeting 2

At the meeting, the participants had a better understanding on how LET works, it was demonstrated while talking about Latino community problems. Also, other conversation was about how to look for information through the website of City of Commerce City and to get to know how the city works, how to get informed and to inform your community, what are your rights as residents, and how to rely on your city to support your community. In addition, we talked about different departments and where they are located (recycling centers, police department, human resources department, etc.), the representatives of the city were Angela Simental and Michelle from the City of Commerce City, who helped with the information for the committee.

The most highlighted issues in this meeting were:

- Vehicle speed in streets
- Animal control problems
- Increase in rents/lack of affordable housing
- Lack of lighting (Rosemary street)
- Insecurity/lack of safety in the community

- Racism and increasing of discrimination from people with power towards minorities in specially the leaders of the country (President of the United States)
- Motor Vehicle is mentioned once more (County issue)
- Communication barriers at the time of traffic accidents

The members of the committee made a commitment to share what they learned during the session, as well as they felt committed to the members of their community.

In conclusion, the community feels motivated by the meaning of the project LET2, and the opportunity to share clear and honest information with the City of Commerce City.

Communication barriers are placed as one of the main problems for the Latino community when it comes to develop relationships, as well as some sectors of the population feel safe expressing that they have been thought some kind of racism, especially from their leaders reflecting this type of behavior.

Commerce City LET Surveys January 2018

Surveys were made in order to gather information from the city, this concludes in:

- Confidence in the police has increased since the LET 1 project and calls for more presence of police officers on the streets
- There is continued community distrust with the police, although there was an increase in the number of people who feel safe in the presence of the police, there are also people who do not feel safe because of their legal status and language barriers with this department
- Communication barriers
- Motor Vehicle customer service
- Racism and discrimination in the city have increased

Communication plays a very important role in the problems of the community, as residents learn every day, about the institutions that can be supported for the improvement of their neighbors and the city, they feel limited in their use due to lack of information in their language, as well as registration of documents and obtaining them, they fear of the lack of information of the laws and restrictions, distrust in institutions responsible for imparting justice.

In comparison to LET 1, a change is observed in how the community develops in the project, however, LET 2 shows us that communication barriers still persist and must continue to be worked on. However there is an advance, encouragement and positive reinforcement by residents.

Meeting 3

In this third meeting the LET group was taken to learn about how the city of Commerce City is structured, from its levels of government to how the municipal council is formed and the responsibilities of it, going through a map of the city which included the most important routes, all this in order to understand the functioning of the city, institutions, and thus be able to exercise

more fluidly their civic duty.

They learned about the goals of the city council:

- Develop a balanced economy
- Have a solvent government
- Develop and maintain the infrastructure of the city

In addition, we had the opportunity to speak with the police chief Nichols who is responsible for 129 employees, and affirmed that the vision under which they operate is: To be the model of excellence in public security and services in the region.

He also affirmed that he has the mission of creating a secure community where residents trust the police force, and for that "you have to earn trust," for that you have a strategic plan of practical operations, fair and impartial surveillance.

Meeting 4

The LET committee met with Lysa Gallegos to talk about the codes and standards of the city, they were presented a video for the group to have a greater understanding.

- There was a dialogue of questions and answers where the doubts of the participants were clarified, it was highlighted that they can communicate as residents with the city code department to provide support and to have clean places, elements of the police department through an interpreter, they explained what the code violations were and the proceeding.

In addition to a tour of the different departments of the city such as: Information and technology, human resources, audits, communication area, public art, numbers to help the elderly, economic development, they were informed about neighborhood services, neighborhood authority, community development, licenses, passports, court, etc.

Meeting 5

The meeting was held, the objective was to inform the community that they should not fear, there are options to exercise their rights as residents and the city can show to its residents that they can trust it, we talked about LET 1 (the report) and how it has progressed on the changes they recommended and how these recommendations will continue with LET 2.

Joanie, who spoke about Victim's Services, gave residents tools to break barriers that the community had in the operation of procedures and of which they did not know.

They talked about the rights and services record, they were informed about their options, such as delaying a case and waiting for the victim to be ready to re-open it, about the confidentiality of their data, and what information to give to the police to continue the case. There was a talk about the structure of a school, support numbers for victim assistance, support for children, and "No matter your immigration status to report a crime."

A recommendation of the committee was to expand the services offered by the department of

victim services in Commerce City, such as support and more information in Spanish, as well as meetings to inform about their services.

Meeting 6

In this LET meeting a general review was made of where it started and where they are now. They completed an evaluation about their experience on the committee, and recommendations to the City based on what they have learned in the process. The following suggestions were given for the next report:

- Improve access to language
- Improve the inclusion of members of the Latino community
- Improve the relationship of the police department with the Latino community

The actions that the City has taken to improve relations were also announced, the police affirmed that they are hiring bilingual staff to break the barriers, the community learned about where to process American passports. To gain the trust of the community, they left the following recommendations:

- Cultural events
- Access to information in our language
- Translate publications on social networks
- A regularly updated list show who on the City staff is bilingual
- Transparency in the legal process/more know your rights trainings

In conclusion LET2 consisted of a group of residents who have many common needs with the Latino community in Commerce City, based on immigration status and communication barriers. The City's willingness to listen to them and share information gives them confidence and makes them feel safe and part of the community in which they live, and they feel like they were given the necessary tools through the 6 meetings. The first two meetings consisted in absorbing information about their needs as residents, and then giving them the necessary tools to be able to take a place of leadership in their community, as well as sharing this information, bonds were created between the institution and the community, which helped them to change their perception of as they saw certain events in the city or certain institutions, making them feel welcome to be part in the development of their community.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In the 6 months, LET participants met once a month to identify challenges and make recommendations to improve relationships, reduce barriers, and increase access to services available to the community. We are proud of what we have accomplished and submit to you the following recommendations for further strengthening Commerce City's goal to build a strong and more inclusive community:

- Continued improved language access
- Cultural events or including activities that celebrate Latino culture in existing events
- Continued improved rapport and community-building opportunities between Latino community and the Commerce City Police Department
- Continued engagement and communication between Commerce City and the Latino community
- Affordable housing strategies to protect families at-risk of displacement
- Co-development of park and community safety strategies with community members, Police Department and Parks and Rec staff.

1. Continue improved language access

- a. Translation at City Council meetings (possibly starting with one or two meetings/year)
- b. Continue increase hiring of fully bilingual staff
 - i. Recruit staff through alternative channels, such as Partnering with local colleges and universities.
 - ii. Offer professional development program for bilingual residents to train and support community members to work successfully for the City
 - iii. Support bilingual staff by listening to their recommendations for mitigating barriers to Latino community members and addressing strongly and consistently any concerns about discrimination.
 - iv. Increase translation of social media posts, including specific content for Latino community members. This work has begun, but more regular social media posts in Spanish, including content that is specifically relevant to Latino families (not just translated from English) will be helpful.
- c. Translation of signage in City buildings (we know the City has begun work on this and that it takes time and resources)
 - i. Civic Center, Recreation facilities
- d. Continue translation work to make informational/resource literature and all vital documents available in Spanish
- e. Create directory of all bilingual staff who work in different departments that can be shared with residents and updated regularly (possibly on the website and shared on social media)

2. Cultural events or including activities that celebrate Latino culture in existing events

- a. Involve Latino community members on event planning/coordination committees
- b. Include Latino cultural aspects to events the City currently hosts
- c. Consider sponsoring a Dia de Los Niños or Dia de los Muertos event, LET members are happy to help with organizing

3. Continued improved rapport and community-building opportunities between Latino community and the Commerce City Police Department

- a. Events in Spanish (rather than bilingual) in the south of the City, with specific outreach and Spanish-speaking officers
- b. Communicate clearly and repeatedly that the Commerce City Police Department and its officers are not interested in community members's immigration status unless they commit a felony
- c. Opportunities for ride-alongs with Spanish-Speaking officers for community members
- d. Continue to have a friendly, regular presence in neighborhoods, continue community policing efforts
- e. Continue efforts to hire bilingual/bicultural officers
- f. Continue outreach and engagement efforts of Victims Service
- g. 911 Awareness Marketing Campaign
 - i. There was a consensus amongst LET members of not being informed that Commerce City does not have a non--emergency number. LET members stated they thought they just did not know the number and were always hesitant to report in fear of consequence for calling 911 for a non--emergency. There is also confusion around 911 calls being routed through the County.

4. Continued engagement and communication between Commerce City and the Latino community

- a. Ongoing engagement between Commerce City and the Latino community
 - i. Continuation of the Latino Engagement Taskforce or Inclusivity Commission to maintain momentum and build partnership
 - ii. Continue Telephone Town Halls in Spanish (these are gaining momentum and have been a powerful strategy to building trust and rapport). Possible themes for next TTH include affordable housing, educational concerns, public/park safety
 - iii. Hiring high level staff who reflects the community to highlight City's commitment to Latino leadership
 - iv. Include Spanish-Speaking Council Members in LET as possible
- b. Communications strategies to highlight what the City has done to build equity, inclusion, and trust with the Latino community and implement LET recommendations
 - i. Social media
 - ii. Press release to Spanish newspapers, television, and radio that highlights LET and City's commitment to building a welcoming, inclusive

- Commerce City (not necessary to get credit, but to make sure community members know that they are welcome, safe, and their families and children are cared about by the City)
- iii. Articles in City newspaper

5. Affordable Housing Strategies that Protect Low-Income Commerce City Families At-risk of Displacement

- a. Seek and support partnerships and funding to develop affordable housing within South Commerce City
- b. Consider land banking or land trusts within the City
- c. Require or reward development of affordable units within any new development projects
- d. Protect mobile home parks from rezoning until other attainable solutions are developed
- e. Consider inclusionary zoning ordinance
- f. Consider policies that protect the rights of renters
- g. Enforce code violations of rental properties
- h. Continue to support access to legal resources for community members facing unfair evictions
- i. Consider innovative strategies like tiny homes, resident owned housing cooperatives on City owned land, etc
- j. Note: any and all strategies must take into account the demographics, culture, and immigration status on Commerce City community members most at risk for displacement

6. Co-development of Park and Community Safety Strategies with Community Members, Police Department and Parks and Rec staff.

- a. Healthy Places funding will include \$10,000 for facilitated meetings with Parks and PD staff and community members to discuss concerns about neighborhood and park safety and strategize effective communications strategies to address them.
- b. Issues of safety, stray animals, speeding drivers, lighting, drug use in parks, etc came up in multiple LET meetings.
 - i. Major barrier seems to be how/when/if to report issues to Police or Parks, knowing who to call or what to do if families observe problems. A communication method, such as anonymous texting or a specific number to call with bilingual capacity might help, and will also help to build trust between community members and PD.

CONCLUSION

We are aware that this continues to be a long list of recommendations, some of which will take a few years and additional resources for the city to implement. For this, Cultivando, would recommend focusing on a handful of short--term priorities, including:

1. City/department--wide policy and stated values on inclusion, including clarity about documentation status of community members. The proclamation was incredible, and that language can be included in department policies and trainings.
2. Communication strategies in Spanish to share with the greater Latino community the efforts the City has made towards inclusion, equity, and building trust. Clearly and repeatedly communicating that the City and Police Department are not interested in community members' immigration status unless they commit a felony. This will help to build trust and reduce fear and stress in the community, and will eventually increase civic engagement and participation.
3. Continuation of a Latino Task Force or official Latino or Inclusivity Commission to continue this work in collaboration.

Continuing to focus collaboration with the Latino community in Commerce City is vital to accomplishing the remaining recommendations.

