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LatinX Community Language Barriers: Local Food Sustainability and Food Insecurity

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LATINX COMMUNITY BARRIERS

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Author Note

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Abstract

This service learning project researched food sustainability and food insecurity issues with a focus on the local Hispanic community. Often the available resources to combat food insecurity do not get to the communities that need them the most due to language barriers and accessibility of information. I created a newsletter in English and Spanish and posted it on my website TelaWeb.Org. The link for the website was shared through social media, and provided to various stakeholders involved in the project to share on their own social media pages or websites. This newsletter addresses the value of food sustainability, provides information and data on food insecurity, and where to locate resources that can help if community members are experiencing food insecurity.

Keywords: LatinX, Language Barrier, Food Insecurity, Local Food Sustainability, Hispanic, Socioeconomic Barriers, Service Learning, TelaWeb.

Introduction to my Capstone Project

I had several projects in mind that I wanted to do to reflect on the culmination of my studies at Boise State University. I wanted to do a project that would combine what I had learned in my multidisciplinary studies courses with what I had learned in my minor courses for Spanish interpretation and a LatinX community engagement certificate. I wanted to do a service learning project because I am a first-generation Latina of parents who immigrated to this country and I was interested in performing a project that would benefit the LatinX community. As a descendant, I am proud to identify as part of this community. I desired to do a project to provide information and resources to assist the local Hispanic community.

In August 2022, I was invited to attend an event sponsored by Idaho Partners for Good (IP4G). This event was a unique food experience for culinary enjoyment and education for people with a passion for food, otherwise known as “foodies”. Since I have a profile on Instagram dedicated to a passion for gastronomy, this event was ideal. I was very impressed with the fantastic food served and the way the ingredients were sourced through local businesses and groups familiar with the local food systems. The information presented by various leaders familiar with the barriers facing people in our region and local sustainably produced food was educational and eye-opening. This event inspired me to base the project on the concept of food sustainability and the social issue of food insecurity. I decided to approach my service-learning project by creating a newsletter in English and Spanish that would focus on information about our local food systems and draw attention to the social issue of food insecurity. According to the Capital Area Food Bank (2021), “residents who were newly food insecure were two times less likely to speak English as their primary language - and they were also three times less likely to be connected with government assistance programs.” The Hispanic community is an underserved

community that would benefit from having more information about the food systems in Idaho in their native Spanish language.

Elements coming together

I wanted to include multiple perspectives on this topic, so I included spotlight interviews from various stakeholders that were a part of the project, as well as information and resources that community members could access if they were experiencing food insecurity. In the newsletter, I wanted to build bridges between all the stakeholders within the project—farmers, chefs, advocates, business owners, non-profit organizations, and community members—to challenge the industrial food systems while providing resources for healthy food. I wrote about the barriers—educational, economic, systemic, and infrastructural—standing between people in our region and local sustainably produced food. People from different cultures face several barriers when trying to obtain information and resources, and language is one of the critical barriers. Speakers at the event I attended said that a small percentage of the information on local food sustainability and resources reaches BIPOC communities. My innovative approach was to provide these resources in a preferred language that people in the community could access that is readily available and understandable. I chose to use the skills learned in Spanish translation to assist in breaking down the barrier of language providing value to all stakeholders involved in the project.

A vital part of this project was to consider the emotional intelligence aspects. Having the ability to perceive, interpret, demonstrate, control, and use emotions to communicate with and relate to others effectively became an essential component. If the only perspective were from me, then I would run the risk of the project being one-sided, and it would have a lack of inclusivity

for the awareness and emotions of others. For example, I could not only assume that community members understood food sustainability and why it was so important. I had to be careful to ask questions that would be considerate of the audience's emotional intelligence and seek honest feedback from stakeholders that would allow for more detailed responses rather than only a yes or no answer. I was continually curious if they had other ideas that would be of value to others that might not have been considered while also paying particular attention to how the audience engaged with the ideas and their reactions toward the project. All of this added strength and validity and allowed for new and creative ideas that gave supplementary benefits to it. Putting all these elements together provides the community with different points of view and experiences. It helps to create an understanding and empathy for the struggles and successes of each stakeholder. Finally, providing resources where community members can seek assistance freely without judgment or shame to help break down barriers and demonstrate that we also share common problems, but some solutions can help.

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "engagement" as an emotional involvement or commitment. Because my certificate is in LatinX Community *Engagement*, I wanted to create a solution that *engaged* these community members. Being a part of the LatinX community is part of my legacy as a first-generation Latin American. As such, I wanted to use my creative framework to find a way to help an underserved community. Collaborating with others helped me create new ideas to solve problems while managing my projects, such as website design, newsletter design, and logo artwork. Putting all of this framework together caused me to realize the need for a website that people could look to for additional resources and discussions on topics and issues they face.

My first goal was to help provide knowledge about food sustainability and to provide information to people who read the newsletter about an issue they may not be aware of that exists with our food supply. My second goal was to address the social issue of food insecurity that a large population of people face. According to CBS2 (2022), “In 2021, an estimated one in nine Idahoans are food insecure--that's 202,390 people. The rate for children is even higher, and an estimated 57,620 children do not have enough to eat.” My third goal was to offer different perspectives from local business owners, non-profit organizations, and local members of the Hispanic community. My final goal was to provide resources to assist with food insecurity so that if even one person in our local community could receive a benefit, it would be an exceptional value for all involved in this project.

According to a new USDA report, hunger declined in the U.S. from 2020 to 2021, but 1 in 10 households were still food insecure with no reliable access to enough food. The report also found that “a higher percentage of Latino (16.2%) households experienced food insecurity than White households (7%).” From this data, we can see that food insecurity disproportionately impacted Hispanic people. “When considering Latino low-income households, 69.4% were food secure, 18.8% were food insecure, and 11.8% were very low food security.” (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbit, Gregory, Singh, 2022) Latino adults and children are also at greater risk of obesity and diabetes, which is complicated by food insecurity. However, Latino households are less likely to utilize the Food Stamp program than white, non-Hispanic client households. A lack of knowledge about sustainable food resources, along with language barriers, are factors that can prevent Latino households from accessing private or community food assistance programs. By doing this capstone, I wanted to present a simple and understandable newsletter providing knowledge on the urgency of food sustainability and connecting people with the resources

available in their community as an efficient way to reach an audience that usually is under-represented. Doing this was innovative because it could reach a much larger audience than if I only interacted with the community at events. Where people would most likely go to get information on food assistance, such as websites, blogs, newsletters, and social media, is where many Hispanic families ran into problems accessing these types of resources because they were set up for English speakers only. Since I can provide the content in a different language, I can reach an audience that is usually disadvantaged, especially if they struggle with a language barrier. Additionally, through social media, I can reach a much larger audience and reach them in a way that is more approachable on their terms, meaning when they have time to read the newsletter in a comfortable setting.

Results

I intend to use web analytics to determine and measure the impact of this project on the website telaweb.org. By studying the website analytics, we can see the amount of traffic generated and the number of times the newsletter was accessed. Additionally, we can determine the number of page views on the newsletter. Social media sharing, likes, comments, where people are coming from based on the IP address, and how people got to the website will also determine the impact of the capstone project.

Non-profit organization stakeholders should benefit from the project by having additional information on food sustainability and insecurity in English and Spanish to expose their mission to a broader audience than before. The local community can benefit from the project by learning about food sustainability and its importance. More importantly, the aim is that they benefit from the resources provided in the newsletter if they are experiencing food insecurity. The ultimate

impact of this project would be to reach members of the local Hispanic community who deal with language and cultural barriers. If community members can realize the benefit of sustainable food, this will help local farmers and businesses increase their production, causing a chain reaction in the food supply system. Finally, the intention in doing this project is to see the successful result of using education to make a meaningful impact in the community and provide a service that helps improve people's lives.

The actual impact of this project has yet to be discovered as it has yet to collect the data required from the analytics. However, I was able to collect some feedback from various people involved in my project. My daughter, who has used Canva in the past to create her own newsletters, reviewed the content of the newsletter and assisted me with some changes to the text to help with the flow of information being communicated. My sister, who is a graphic designer, went through the newsletter and has updated the formatting so that colors, fonts, and borders are eye-catching to readers. She communicated to me that it was a good start but felt that it needed some extra touches to really stand out. My husband designed the opening page of the website, which contains the links for the newsletter in English and Spanish. He reviewed the title and the short summary that was added to explain the purpose of the website. The summary also indicates that it will be continually updating with more pages that provide the vision, mission, and services that TelaWeb will provide. My Facebook page has to this date received twenty likes, and four people have shared the website on their own pages. The website analytics already show 102 views on the opening page and 63 views of the newsletter, and will likely show an increase in viewership from people accessing the newsletter over time as social media and other forms of communication become passed on for others to see.

Conclusion

I noticed that websites and social media information on this topic was reaching a small portion of community members in the Treasure Valley and that an even smaller percentage was reaching the Hispanic community. Because of this realization, it was anticipated that creating a newsletter would be the best way to disseminate information on the topic. Various non-profit organizations, such as the City of Good, FARE Idaho, and the Idaho Organization of Resource Councils, are going to share the newsletter on their social media to highlight and reinforce their missions. Local business owners, such as Adelfa's Cuban Food, are sharing the newsletter as well and should be able to see an increase in customers due to the spotlights done in the newsletter. Local community members will benefit from reading the newsletter and learning more about a topic they may have yet to be aware of or thought was important. Even more, benefits should be realized in the Hispanic community, which is generally underrepresented in receiving information and viable resources due to language barriers. I anticipated that featuring community members in the newsletter that shared the same ethnicity would help establish a level of comfort for others in the community to reach out for help if they needed it.

I will know the results of the newsletter once the link becomes public this coming week. I expect people I have discussed the project with to share the information. I have established many contacts within the community that are excited to read and share this information. Because of this, I anticipate these results to yield high traffic to the website. I expect to be able to add additional resources to the newsletter in time as word gets out to other organizations that would like to be added to it. The wonderful thing about the newsletter is that it can be easily updated at any time to provide even more current information or new resources previously not included.

While working on this project, different factors caused me to reflect on what I would have done differently. When I had the attention of a stakeholder, it was crucial to do some quick interview questions and get the information needed for content for the newsletter. Instead, I thought it would be more professional to book meetings to conduct these interviews. I later realized that by doing this, I had lost the momentum I had built up discussing the project with some stakeholders. This occurrence led to canceled meetings; however, these experiences also helped me learn how to rearrange tasks within the project timeline and pivot and readjust to accommodate for these changes as an essential part of the project's time management. After all, it is not just about what you do but about why and how you do it. Overall I have considered this project a success and one I will use in the future to build upon for other projects within my non-profit organization that I have begun to develop on the new website.

Appendix

Website: [Home \(telaweb.org\)](http://telaweb.org)

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