

# **FUERZA MEXICANA**

THE PAST, PRESENT, AND POWER OF  
MEXICANS IN CHICAGOLAND

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This report was commissioned by:



GREATER SOUTHWEST  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



## Call to Action

As Mexicans, it is incumbent upon us to demand the changes we want to see and participate actively in making these changes happen. This report is a starting point to make those changes happen by presenting wide-ranging and revelatory data about Mexicans in Chicagoland.

We call on Mexicans to become our strongest advocates and:

- Engage in ongoing conversations about what it means to be Mexican. Use the complementary discussion questions to guide these conversations.
- Urge all recipients of public resources such as school districts, public hospitals, FQHCs, nonprofits, and government agencies to collect data specific to national origin and ethnicity. In the multiple spaces we occupy through our personal and professional lives, we must insist that the data be prioritized.
- Be civically engaged: participate in local government bodies, apply for U.S. citizenship, and vote!
- Support Mexican leadership—donate your treasure and volunteer your time to Mexican-led and Mexican-serving nonprofits.

We call on all our allies to join us in these advocacy efforts and:

- Assess your organization's leadership and whether it reflects the Mexican population in the communities you serve
- Seek out ways to collect data that is specific to national origin and ethnicity within your organization.
- Ensure financial support and donations are being equitably distributed to Mexican-led/Mexican-serving organizations.

We all must support the production and promotion of the next phase of this project to encourage a deeper understanding of who we are and how we want our community to grow through more studies and reports. Donate to: [Latinospro.org/donate](https://Latinospro.org/donate) "Fuerza Mexicana Reports" to help make that happen.

As Mexicans, we must exercise our first voice to demand access, representation, and accountability for our communities. Together we are la fuerza (the force) to advocate for a more fair and just society for ourselves and generations to come.

The following questions were crafted to guide discussions during the focus groups that occurred as part of the report's development. Please feel free to use these discussion questions to engage your organization and community about what it means to be Mexican in Chicago.

The questions are organized by topic area, consistent with the report and can be used to guide discussions.

As part of our call for all Mexicans to become our strongest advocates, we encourage you to ask these questions in our community and to power:

- Is the proposed solution and approach to a community challenge and need also serving the interests of the Mexican community?
- Why have no Mexicans been hired or appointed for this role, position, or service? Provide names and contact information of qualified candidates.
- Are our children taught about Mexican history, culture and arts in the U.S. and Mexico? Participate in public meetings and forums and advocate that schools should educate children and youth about their history and culture.

## Education Discussion Questions

1. From your experience, what are the biggest challenges Mexican children face in Chicago's public elementary and middle schools?
2. Does student self-esteem and a sense of pride in being Mexican improve academic performance, and if so, how?
3. How important is it for Mexican students to see role models of Mexican/Latino administrators and teachers in their schools?
4. Do the public schools encourage involvement by Mexican parents, especially those who may be undocumented, and how important is it to do?
5. How important are standardized tests in measuring student achievement? What other ways of measurement are there?
6. Have charter schools provided the educational alternative for Mexican students that the Catholic school system once served? If not, why not?
7. Are strong bilingual education programs crucial for Mexican immigrant students to progress? What about U.S.-born Mexican students?
8. Why are high school graduation rates still lagging among Mexican students and what could be done to improve them?
9. Access to college and higher education for Mexican and Latino youth has expanded in recent decades. For example, recent Latino enrollment was 37% at Northeastern Illinois, 29% at UIC, 20% at DePaul, 18.5% at Loyola, but many students do not finish their degrees or have trouble finding good jobs when they do. What needs to be done to assure greater success rates for Mexican students in college?
10. For Mexican adults who are already in the labor force, how important are continuing education or retraining programs, and what could be done to make them more accessible?

## Health Discussion Questions

1. What are the main obstacles you see to improving overall health of the city's Mexican residents? Are there any needs they have that are different from other Latinos?
2. What are some best practices you know of efforts to improve health outcomes within the Mexican community?
3. How big a problem is access to health insurance for Mexicans and Mexican Americans that you come in contact with compared to other Latinos or the general Chicago population?
4. Do Mexicans you serve tend to identify as Mexican, Latino, Hispanic, Latinx, Mexican American or American, etc.?
5. How big a problem is asthma among Mexicans and Mexican Americans you know, and what should be done to reduce asthma incidence?
6. What about obesity and diabetes?
7. Domestic violence and sexual assault?
8. How hard is it to talk about mental health problems and trauma among Mexicans and Mexican Americans?
9. What are the main obstacles you see for Mexicans to access quality mental health counseling? What about those who are undocumented?
10. What special health needs do Mexican youth have that are not being adequately met?

## Employment and Business Discussion Questions

1. What do you think are the contributions of Mexican workers to the city's economic life? How widely do you think this is recognized by either the business community and/or the general public?
2. What do you think are the contributions of Mexican-owned businesses to the city's economic life? How widely do you think this is recognized by either the business community and/or the general public?
3. Do you think it is important for people to know/recognize the role of Mexican workers and businesses in Chicago and the region's economy? Why or why not?
4. Is there a culture of entrepreneurship among Chicago's Mexican community? How would you describe this culture of entrepreneurship?
5. From your experience, what are the main barriers or obstacles that confront Mexican-owned businesses? What about Mexican workers?
6. From your experience, have you or someone you know had difficulty obtaining financing for a Mexican business?
7. How do you assess opportunities for Mexican women to become successful in business ownership? What are the specific obstacles women still face?
8. Have you seen examples of progress in recent years when it comes to local and state government contracting for services from Mexican/Latino-owned businesses? What could be done to improve that?
9. Employment opportunities for Mexican workers have historically centered in manufacturing and warehousing, landscaping and construction, hotels and restaurants, health care and domestic services. Have you seen changes in recent years toward job opportunities that provide better conditions, higher pay and more job security? What still needs to be done?
10. What about employment of Mexicans by city government – as teachers, firefighters, police, sanitation workers, and in other major agencies? What do you see as impediments to greater government hiring of Mexicans in proportion to their number in the population?

## Housing and Community Development Questions

1. Do you feel that all your basic needs are met in your community? (e.g. healthy food, work, health services, physical activity, outdoor recreation). What about cultural needs?
2. Do you feel culturally isolated in your community from other Mexicans? Is it preferable, in your view, to live in mostly Mexican neighborhoods or in areas that are ethnically and racially diverse, and why?
3. Do you feel that housing is affordable in your community? Why or why not?
4. Do you own a home? Is home ownership a goal for you and your family? If not, why?
5. How important do you think is the creation of generational wealth? What are some of the obstacles for accumulating wealth?
6. What type of development do you think your community needs the most. Rank in order of priority and discuss your ranking. (retail/commercial, open space, affordable housing, market-rate housing, small business support, health care, cultural institutions)
7. Do you feel that priorities for development in your community are clearly established? If not, how can you ensure that these are well known and implemented?



## Citizenship and Civic Participation Discussion Questions

1. What is your most enjoyable and or most disagreeable experience as a Mexican-American in this city?
2. Do the Mexican youths you come in contact with exhibit pride in or identify with their Mexican origin? And does it matter?
3. To what extent do you feel the Mexican contribution to the city is acknowledged by the general population or by other Latinos?
4. As the city and state have scrambled to provide emergency services and work permits to thousands of recent asylum seekers, what has been the reaction among longtime Mexican residents you know?
5. Our research on the last mayoral election shows only 2 of 10 registered Latinos even bothered to vote, the lowest participation level of any racial or ethnic group. Even in national elections, Illinois has some of the worst Latino voting levels of any major state. What would you do to motivate more Chicago Mexicans to vote?
6. Are Mexicans employed as public school teachers, in government agencies, in corporate suites or in philanthropy in adequate numbers, and if not, why do you think that is?
7. If you were mayor of Chicago, what's the first thing you would do to address the conditions of the Mexican community?
8. What are the examples you've seen of Mexican youth achieving success and what are the challenges for them in terms of violence and crime? What would you do differently in terms of youth policy?
9. How well are Mexican-owned businesses servicing the community, and what could they do better?
10. Have intergroup relations between Mexicans and other ethnic and racial groups – white, Black, Asian and even other Latinos – progressed in recent years, and what examples come to mind. What could be done to improve them?