

Report on the Consortium for Latina/o Arts & Culture Dialogs

June 29, 2007, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
at the Arizona Commission on the Arts

“It’s been twenty years since we’ve done this.” “This is an historic moment for Latino culture in Arizona.” These are a couple of the often repeated comments from the day, when 30 Latino artists, activists and organizational representatives gathered to talk about forming a coalition to empower their community. The group met for an intense two hours of dialog and planning that was sponsored and organized by the Cultural Coalition, Inc. and Calaca Cultural Center, led by Carmen de Novais, Ruben Hernandez and Marco Albarran. The purpose for convening the Latina/o arts & cultural community encompassed the following:

- Share & gather community-specific information
- Dialog & envision potential action as a community
- Identify next steps individually & collectively
- Celebrate new connections & honor familiar ones

On arrival, participants shared coffee, reconnected with people they might not have seen for 10 years or more, and began responding to the four questions posted on the conference rooms walls. At 9:50, the organizers introduced Robert Booker, executive director of the Arizona Commission on the Arts, who welcomed the group, introduced a few members of his staff and stated how important this gathering is for our state. He also committed to support the efforts of the coalition. His welcome was followed by Linda Torres’ introduction of Ruth Osuna, Deputy City Manager for the City of Phoenix, who voiced that “This is the start of a process of leadership in your community; and all of you have made a commitment to be those leaders.” She also spoke of her conversation with Phil Jones, director of the Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture, concerning the need for a Latino Cultural Center, and acknowledged the importance of former Latino gathering sites like the MARS Artspace. Ruth brought word that the mayor’s office as well expresses support for this significant movement, and at the same time recognized that the event extends beyond the City of Phoenix to other local communities and the entire state. Carmen, Ruben and Marco each welcomed the participants, and Carmen set the tone for the day by speaking positively about the purpose and expected results. Then she introduced Judy Butzine the documenter and the facilitator for the day, Melanie Ohm with Concepts Consulting Group, Inc., and the dialogs began!

The Dialogs centered around four broad questions to gather and organize information in four areas: past experiences; internal capacities; external demands; and vision for the future.

- Picture Latina/o arts & culture in Arizona - the people, the organizations, the events. What are your strongest memories? Why are they important?
- Looking back over the past year, what are the pressures, expectations and challenges that come to mind for Latina/o arts & cultural workers and organizations?
- Consider your roles & your work as artists and organizations, both in local communities & statewide. What are your contributions and your strengths?
- Envision Latina/o arts & culture thriving across Arizona: creating, organizing, educating... What is your vision? What are your resources? Your tools? Structures? Spaces? What helps you to be more effective & responsive? Who are your partners?

The responses as written and recorded were as follows.

**Picture Latina/o arts & culture in Arizona - the people, the organizations, the events.
What are your strongest memories? Why are they important?**

As Written

- play at ASU honoring WW II vets
- a major Latino gathering
- Festivales Latinos, see big number of Latinos
- Being a member of the Vaqueros in South Phoenix
- The early days of Teatro del Valle
- History – veteranos
- Clear purpose
- Assertive approach
- celebrating Chicano arts (visual/performing arts) in Guadalajara Bi-National Exchange
- I miss MARS ARTSPACE!! a gathering, support group for those with similar issues -
- Ariztlan members meeting with other AZ artists & Mexico art exchanges!
- Disclosing our artistic visions and aspirations!

As Recorded

- Xicanindio festivals in park – Dias de los Muertos
- Cinco de Mayo
- AZ International Latino festival
- Murals
- Memories of fathers and grandfathers – the stories of family
- International artist visits
- Latino festivals reflecting diversity [of the Latino community]
- Emergence of non-Mexican art
- March for Immigration
- La Procesión
- Hispanic Women's Conference
- ArtsWork@Herberger involving youth
- 1995-1999 Latino theatre and music awakening – play of Francisco
- Teatro Movimiento
- Folclorico
- Lowrider as an outsider culture that became mainstream – drew out artists

Why is all of this important?

- equity in arts and culture
- national perspective – need for recognition, celebration, pride in identity
- need to recognize who people are culturally
- myth of assimilation – what does it really mean to be American?
- elements of social justice, dynamism, cultural synergy
- Latino culture as enriching a broader community
- passing on traditions, a legacy
- education – only way to share cultural knowledge
- intergenerational activity
- address disconnect between those who are already here, including natives, and those recently arrived
- confront economic and historical issues

- all people are part of the story
- the muralist produces free art and draws public attention
- need for inclusion – events that are responsive
- preserving history
- serving our selves, our communities
- sharing of artistic visions, ideas
- strengthening ideals
- need for place / space – interactive venues
- serving tradition and preserving
- connection between various Latino cultures

Looking back over the past year, what are the pressures, expectations and challenges that come to mind for Latina/o arts & cultural workers and organizations?

As Written

- \$\$ Finding it Latino-style and non-Latino style
- Building audience
- are you Latino enough?
- not internal or inclusive discussions
- overcoming racism is a challenge
- burnout
- being the largest minority is a large pressure on our community to produce cultural arts
- education inclusive of our Latino culture
- central branding

As Recorded

- “white” existing structures
- moving literature/publications by Latinos into the Latino community
- risk of “classism” and consumerism
- lack of appreciation among Latinos for their own art
- need for support from “support” organizations
- fear
- need to use stories to connect cultures
- lack of Latino community investment
- need for Latino contributions, a philanthropic ethic
- stereotypic media depictions (Russell Pierce)
- need for other forms/forums for Latino participation in all organizations and media
- representation in organizations
- local (Arizona) representation in local major venues
- lack of partnerships
- raice con cosmica
- bound, stuck in own cultural identity, prideful, unwilling to learn
- need for strategic partnerships and trainings (higher education, Hispanic leadership)
- lack of Latino elected leaders
- need to develop leadership
- need to populate legislature
- Latino artists – pressure to conform to predefined image
- need to tell story of Latino community here

- reframe the notion of support, lift each other up
- need to unite, honor differences and recognize each other
- need for change of perspective on the role of the arts

Consider your roles & your work as artists and organizations, both in local communities & statewide. What are your contributions and your strengths?

As Written

- communication is key
- I can talk to anyone of different race or background
- cont. I am there
- visibility is our strength
- national recognition
- advocate
- ability to form strong partnerships: artists and business and community

As Recorded

- Iconography
- Rich visual history that honors all: Virgin of Guadalupe, Fatima, Farmworkers union
- Capacity already exists through Arts & Business Council of Phoenix to form partnerships
- grassroots capacity for change
- Publications bring legitimacy [reference to Hispanic Research Center]
- Latino organizations are currently a strong focus for public attention
- connections with youth who are leadership ready, have hope for change
- lowrider club capable of serving as role models for youth
- ecology of diverse groups, organizations, cultural bases
- broad representation of arts and cultural activity in Latino community
- becoming upper/middle class with purchase power not yet tapped into
- soon will be a majority
- being so American that we challenge the constitution every day
- potential to change American society – leadership potential
- capacity for creative solutions

Envision Latina/o arts & culture thriving across Arizona: creating, organizing, educating... What is your vision? What are your resources? Your tools? Structures? Spaces? What helps you to be more effective & responsive? Who are your partners?

As Written

- unity is our strength
- “need” is our fuel
- our community needs a centro cultural Latino
- my studio, people
- background in science
- space in Arizona
- Unidos Por Nuestra: causa y cultura tradiciones
- coalition builder (performing arts)

- need space
- collaborating on space and resources
- if the Chinese can have their own cultural center, why can't we have one too?
- our creativity and talents are our "tools"
- our community is our partner
- God
- Glendale Community Center
- First Fridays Artwalk
- The Church
- A Latino Cultural Center facility
- private funding
- new studio gallery
- continuous public art projects
- hip-hop (underground)
- The Movement
- "being real"
- My partners are friends from the community
- other artists/poets/musicians/dancers

As Recorded

What is the vision?

- a proactive community to position ourselves and gain recognition
- a space that includes: arts, museums, offices, businesses, retail, theatre, studios, food, festival center, classrooms for education
- connect with Mexico and California cultural centers
- OUR HOUSE – together from today on
- utilizing bond election system
- youth mentors and teachers, a focus on a new generation
- identify political advocates, philanthropists and business partners
- create website
- use technology: listserv, recruiting
- P.A.C. Political Action Committee established: affecting policy, influencing elections, garnering financial backing, using the system
- marketing power as a coalition – what is the coalition? what does it do?
- organization and agency capacity building
- campaign for cultural center
- asset inventory for all organizations

At this point the coalition distilled **four main visionary structures** out of the above brainstorming session. Those four ideas are:

- A Cultural Center (physical space)
- A coalition-building Consortium (physical interaction)
- Technology infrastructure (virtual interaction)
- A Political Action Committee (political interaction)

The participants voted and unanimously agreed that these four visionary structures would be the focus of their work together. Furthermore, two must be addressed first – the Consortium and the Technology.

The Consortium Discussion

As Voted upon and Recorded

- will include celebrations and gatherings
- every two months on the 4th Friday at 4:00 p.m.
- everyone bring one person
- will involve food and music
- rotate cities – discussed possibility of Yuma in October
- share portfolios and bring calendars to the next meeting
- committee for next meeting: Dan Cortez, Yvonne Jimenez, Eva Olivas, Martin Moreno, Carmen de Novais, Ruben Hernandez

Save the date! August 24, 4:00 p.m., hosted by Xico, Inc. at 128 Pepper Place in Mesa. We will begin with a business meeting and follow with a celebration.

The Technology Discussion

As Recorded

- a listserv will be begun immediately
- Yvonne Jimenez offered to create a site for us on MySpace under the name LatinoArtsAZ. The name is a place holder until the group agrees upon one.
- Latino Perspectives has offered to house and man the website
- technology committee: Carmen, Ruben, Yvonne

The final action of the coalition was to write personal and/or organizational commitments on an index card and share those commitments with the person next to them. Those comments are documented and attached.

Jim Covarrubias asked to make a closing comment to the group, and some of his comments are paraphrased in the following bullets:

- this is a continuation of work that was started long ago, stay together this time
- create short term and long term goals
- your strengths are not in this building (the ACA), but in yourselves. your strength is collective
- realize that the community, businesses and education all need this
- keep the political pressure on
- participate, attend meetings, but be a thinker
- this group is an evolution

Louis Leroy commented strongly, “The single most disastrous thing in a coalition is individual ego.” If you are becoming a dictator, get out.

Carmen thanked everyone in closing for attending, and the meeting closed at 11:40 a.m.

Attachments:

- Attendance List
- Email distribution list
- Organization Spreadsheet (2 tabs): Arts & Culture, Supporting Orgs
- Latino Consortium bios
- Commitments to the Consortium