



Executive Memo

To: Jessica Sotelo, Executive Director, Partners for Prosperity
From: Ramona Higley, Ph.D., Research Specialist, Partners for Prosperity
Date: February 16, 2005
RE: Gaps in Data and Appropriate Research Methods Relative to Minority Groups

The purpose of this memo is to summarize the discussions of recent meetings with individuals from the Fort Hall community and from the Latino community relative to gaps in available data about these communities and appropriate research methods to fill these gaps. Future meetings and discussions of research concerns are needed to clarify what research efforts would be most beneficial in order to reduce poverty and fill the gaps.

FORT HALL

Data Gaps

The attendees at a recent Fort Hall meeting identified several gaps in the data with the Fort Hall community. The following is a summary of research gaps noted at this meeting.

1. Gaps in the U.S. Decennial Census Data

According to those in attendance, there are many problems with the way that the U.S. Census Bureau gathered information about Native Americans on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation and the surrounding communities. Although a national task force to improve data collection methods was attended by several members from the Fort Hall community, the recommendations of that task force were not implemented due to political wrangling.

Some of the problems with data gathering by the U.S. Census Bureau are due to unclear definitions of race and ethnicity. There are people living in Fort Hall and the surrounding communities who are members of the Shoshone-Bannock tribes; who are Native American and members of a different tribe; Native American and not members of any tribe; and Non-Native American people who are living in Fort Hall. Identifying members of each of these groups is problematic because the U.S. Census is not designed to probe these issues.

Another problem with the census data is the inaccurate report of household composition. Native Americans may define households differently than they were defined by the Census Bureau. There seems to be potential for underreporting of the population because of these differences in definitions. Other problems in data collection by the Census Bureau were also noted.

2. Tribal Data Sharing

Fort Hall Indian Reservation operates under a tribal government system. Representatives of the Tribal Business Council are elected and serve a two-year term. However, the tribe holds annual elections so as to stagger appointment of those seven business council seats. Because of the relatively quick turnover of the tribal council, there is a constant change of



ideas and agendas within the tribal government. Due to the frequent shift there are some problems with generating a consistent policy for gathering and distribution of information within the Shoshone-Bannock community.

In addition, a great deal of information about tribal members is kept by the Office of Enrollment. Information about every tribal member and every person applying for tribal membership is held there. Nevertheless, there may be a problem of accessing the information. There is a need for data software, data handling training, and data personnel to improve the accessibility of this information.

It appears that tribal agencies are in the process of gathering information for the needs of their particular organizations, but there is little communication between agencies or sharing of information.

Overall, there seems to be sense of frustration about gathering information in the Fort Hall community. People attending the meeting expressed a need for more information and also a concern about the accessibility of information. However, there is also a concern that research and development efforts must not interfere with the values, beliefs and customs of the Fort Hall community if they are to be accepted by those living in Fort Hall.

Research Methods

Researchers will need to overcome several obstacles in the Fort Hall community and some methods of inquiry may be more appropriate for this population than others. The people of Fort Hall have a unique history including disputes between the tribes and both federal and state governments; the tribes and non-tribal neighbors living in Idaho; the tribes and other tribes; and the tribal government and the Fort Hall residents. This seems to have resulted in a general feeling of apprehension and distrust by many members of the Fort Hall community. Because research relies on building trust between the researcher and the informants, it may be a slow process to get to the point of being able to implement more in-depth research activities with the Fort Hall community.

Several things will help in building trust and opening the doors for research in the future:

1. Partners for Prosperity (P4P) research should have the approval of the Tribal Business Council.
2. P4P should begin by assisting tribal organizations to find ways to manage the data that has already been gathered. (This may include helping organizations write a grant that would be used to buy a data processing program and to pay the salary of a data analyst).
3. P4P should work with the members of the Fort Hall community to develop appropriate research topics and methods.
4. The Fort Hall community should participate in all aspects of research, including the analysis and writing of results.



In summary, any future research within the Fort Hall community should include direct participation of members of that community.

LATINO COMMUNITY

Data Gaps

As with the Fort Hall community, there are several gaps in data that are unique to the Eastern Idaho Latino community. Although there were many concerns about the gathering and distribution of information that would be helpful to the Latino community, two concerns stood out as relative to the identification and reduction of poverty for this group.

1. Educational Access

Individuals at this meeting were concerned that Latino children may not be given the same access to higher education (academic and technical) as other students and that Latino children are subtly and systematically being denied access to opportunities that develop leadership and social skills. The skills necessary to succeed in college are built into primary and secondary schools through extra curricular activity and through advanced courses. Because there is very little data on Latinos in Idaho schools, the community is unsure how to address the issue. Attendees saw a need to gather data on the number of Latino students involved with extra-curricular activities and the types of high school activities in which they participate.

They also saw a need to evaluate the perceived tendency for Latino students to be systematically directed to English as Second Language (ESL) courses that are usually offered as an alternative to advanced English, math and science courses. It was perceived by the attendees at this meeting that understanding the experience of Latino students in schools could help those working specifically with the Latino population to overcome some of the obstacles that hinder individual access to higher education and living wage jobs.

2. Gaps in the U.S. Decennial Census Data

The second gap in data identified by this group was a concern with the U.S. Decennial Census data collection. Funding for migrant workers goes to the states that count them in the census. However, because the census is conducted as of April 1, many of the migrant workers who live part of the year in Idaho are working and residing in other states at the time of the count. Although these migrant workers receive services in Idaho, they are not counted for federal funds distributed to Eastern Idaho agencies. Raising the issue of equitability in funding based on migration patterns was an issue for this group. They suggested that there is a need to know how many migrant workers and their families are living in Idaho part of the year.

Other concerns about U.S. Census data collection were also raised. The people at this meeting stated that many in the Latino community were not counted in the census for a variety of reasons. Fear of government disapproval and confusion about what the census is



used for may contribute to under reporting. There are also problems with multiple families living in households that may not have been counted.

3. Other Concerns

A number of other concerns were voiced by the people in attendance at this meeting including a general feeling that Latinos are at a disadvantage in Eastern Idaho because of missing or inaccurate information about small business development; laws; lending and savings programs; and other such things. It was expressed by some in attendance that there are people who systematically work to block opportunities and keep Latinos from advancing. Some suggestions were made on creating how-to guides to work through some of these obstacles. These concerns could more directly be addressed by increasing small business and adult education opportunities in the region than by formalized research activities.

Research Methods

There are several ways to begin to close the noted gaps in data.

1. Researchers should build partnerships with existing organizations that are collecting data relative to the Latino population. These partnerships would enable P4P to gain greater access to the Latino population and understand laws and regulations relative to migration, employment, and the use of services in order to reduce risks associated with doing research with the Latino population.
2. Before original research is undertaken, follow-up studies need to be conducted. For instance, a 1990 study conducted by the Idaho State Office of Hispanic Affairs identified several factors that would reduce high school drop-out rates for Hispanic youth in this area and increase student involvement. Studies should be done to see if schools have applied the concepts suggested by that study (and others) before originating new research related to the same topic.
3. An effort to consolidate existing information should also precede any new research activities. There is more information available about the demographics of the communities than may be of common knowledge. School districts, the migrant council, the department of labor, and others collect information. This information, if compiled in a single data bank, could paint a fairly accurate picture of the Hispanic/Latino population in Eastern Idaho. However, some kind of protection for the families living here needs to be in place in order to justify such a compilation.
4. Finally, researchers need to be cautious of following through with commitments made at the onset of research. Research should only be conducted if it benefits the community. Profit for the researcher should always be secondary to helping the community.

SUMMARY

There are a number of areas where there is inadequate data concerning the populations of both Fort Hall and Latinos living in Eastern Idaho. Both groups could benefit



by research that is conducted with organizations that are currently working to improve the opportunities for the people in these groups. Both groups resist providing information to outsiders who study them and who make promises that they do not keep. Both groups already have organizations that engage in gathering information. However, there is a need in both communities to organize, combine, analyze, and distribute information. There is also a need for research specialists to assist in gathering new information and filling gaps in the data. In addition, both groups could benefit from a centralized data bank that would bring the information gathered from different organizations to a central location that could be accessed by a variety of service agencies. The key seems to be to only do research with the population, not about the population. There also seems to be a need for longitudinal and repeat studies. Both groups were assured the information gathered would be used to increase prosperity and not as an academic exercise.