



LATINO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

NONPROFIT ACCELERATOR EVALUATION REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Latino Community Foundation (LCF) created the Latino Nonprofit Accelerator (Accelerator) to give Latino-led organizations the marketing and fundraising skills, tools, and confidence to tell their stories, garner support, and thrive. The inaugural cohort of nine nonprofits participating in this 16-month Accelerator received access to expertise in fundraising, marketing, and design, enabling them to develop the materials and presentation skills to deliver a compelling pitch to funders and to develop a culture of fundraising within their organizations. This is critical, given mainstream philanthropy's under-investment in nonprofits led by and for Latinos. It is also especially timely as these organizations are on the front lines against the political climate of hostility against Latino communities and culture all across our nation. LCF views the Accelerator as an opportunity to build organizations' capacity to successfully market their missions, not merely for the sake of raising funds, but to establish and leverage power to bring about fundamental social change.

This evaluation report on the Accelerator's first cohort is informed by review of planning documents, reports, articles, blog posts, and email exchanges; interviews with LCF staff and Accelerator organizations; and first-hand observation.

“The Accelerator is not just about marketing and communications. It’s about innovative solutions that help our nonprofits build real power.”

– Masha Chernyak, VP Programs and Policy, LCF

Overall, LCF's Accelerator is simple in design, thoughtful in its delivery, and powerful in its impact. Participant progress demonstrates early, tangible and significant successes made possible by working with coaches, consultants, and LCF staff. Namely, the **nine groups in the Accelerator Initiative have leveraged \$2.5 million in new funding** since being in the Accelerator. More significantly, the leaders of the nine organizations report having **doubled their confidence level** to tell their stories and more boldly raise funds for their groups.

Though longer-term results will take time to become apparent, the very approach to capacity building—treating participant organizations as partners and co-creators,

not merely recipients of support—is groundbreaking and its impact is already deeply felt. **The role of LCF as bridge-builder—as both a partner nonprofit in the movement and conduit and connector to funders—is a strength of this model.**

Likewise, engaging funders as mentors and partners, rather than solely as grantmakers, helped build authentic relationships that were not merely transactional but based on “seeing” and honoring one another’s shared humanity. The bridge-building that LCF has done through the Accelerator has been not only to help create connections between cohort organizations and funders and donors, but to engage philanthropic leaders at a fundamentally human level, allowing them to see—and be seen—as

people, each with a history of their own glories as well as agonies. Participants described this component as uniquely valuable and as a strength for the Accelerator to build upon.

Throughout, LCF has engaged the Accelerator participants as equals, as *comadres y compadres*, fostering a culture of love and support to feed the souls of the leaders and organizations—deepening and exponentially magnifying the capacity building results. This has the potential to serve as a model for the sector, at least for those willing to follow LCF’s lead in bringing “love of humanity” back to the definition of “philanthropy.”

Lessons from this evaluation point to five recommendations for future development:

- 1. Take more time to ramp up and select the next cohort, paying special attention to existing and required capacity to fully participate and benefit from the Accelerator;**
- 2. Consider cohort dynamics such as preexisting relationships, gender differences, and non-Latinx members, and how they may impact belonging and participation;**
- 3. Expect turnover among fundraising staff and build this into the model, such as by proactively inviting and including broader participation from each organization;**
- 4. Test a demand-side approach to sourcing consultants by giving organizations the funds to hire from a pool of trusted providers rather than all use the same ones, and**
- 5. Continue to strengthen the capacity of LCF itself so that it “pours from a filled cup” as it continues to lead this important body of work.**

Context and Background

LCF believes that by investing in Latino-led nonprofits working on the front lines of social change, the entire economy—and our very democracy—will thrive. In California, where Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the state, these organizations are important anchors of their communities and engines of opportunity and innovation. Yet even while they bring powerful assets to this work, Latino-led organizations struggle to secure adequate funding. Nationally, only 1.1% of philanthropic dollars are directed specifically to serving Latino populations.¹

In its efforts to help Latino-led organizations become stronger and more sustainable forces for change, LCF created the first-ever Latino Nonprofit Accelerator, a 16-month program providing a cohort of nine Latino-led nonprofits with funding, training, and a collaborative space in which to build the fundraising and marketing capacity they need to grow and thrive.

In a world where capturing people's attention relies so much on a good story, told in simple language, with eye-catching visuals that stand out in a crowded information landscape, nonprofits have to be strong marketers of their own missions. Yet they are limited by the changing but still-pervasive bias against "overhead" costs such as investments

in fundraising and marketing. LCF's Accelerator is about meeting this practical need not merely as an end in itself, but as a means of building the power of Latino-led organizations, their leaders, and their communities to do nothing less than shape the future.

“[It must] start and end with building political power in communities, so that we can change the destiny of this and the next generation and have leaders fighting for and standing for justice and equity.”

– Jacqueline Martinez Garcel, CEO, LCF

LCF understands the power of communications because of its experience building its own capacity over the past ten years: “We learned that an investment in world-class marketing materials, photography, and infrastructure was critical for us to achieve our mission and make our desired impact...while remaining bold and authentic.”

¹ Foundation Center data, cited in: “State of the Work: Stories from the Movement to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” D5 Coalition, 2016 <http://www.d5coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/D5-SOTW-2016-Final-web-pages.pdf>

“Masha Chernyak had an epiphany in the back of an Uber, while listening to her fellow passenger, an aspiring tech entrepreneur, gush about his big, game-changing idea. *‘These guys will give me the elevator pitch for their cat-food delivery app, look me right in the eyes and say they’re going to change the world,’* said Chernyak. *‘The many organizations we work with really, truly are changing the world—they just don’t know who to tell that story. Or they’re spending all of their time and effort on their mission and don’t have the capacity or resources to get the help they need to tell that story.’*”

—“Program offers organizations a hand up instead of a handout,” by Esther J. Cepeda, columnist with Washington Post Writers Group, 12/14/18

The Accelerator is also inspired by the effectiveness with which entrepreneurial startups garner investments through well-designed pitches, and a desire to empower Latino-led nonprofits with the same skills. LCF’s Vice President of Programs and Accelerator founder

Masha Chernyak explains: “The big thing...is giving these organizations the opportunity to gain confidence, to be able to speak clearly and passionately about what they do, and to inspire funders to invest in projects that are for the community and by the community.”²

LATINO NONPROFIT ACCELERATOR VISION + GOALS



² Chernyak, as quoted in “Program offers organizations a hand up instead of a handout,” by Esther Cepeda, 12/14/18, Lubbock Avalanche-Journal <https://www.lubbockonline.com/news/20181214/cepeda-program-offers-organizations-hand-up-instead-of-handout>

The Accelerator design includes

- Grant funding of \$15,000 for each participating organization in the Accelerator (\$10,000 at launch and an additional \$5,000 mini-grant after presenting their pitch);
- Four facilitated cultural retreats;
- One-on-one consulting with experts in
 - » fundraising (Ivy Fairchild)
 - » branding (JC Velten)
 - » content development for one-pagers (Meredith Fenton)
 - » design (Design Action Collective) and
 - » photography (Bryan Patrick);
- Access to funders/mentors from other philanthropic organizations;
- A culminating Demo Day event featuring participant pitches and grant awards;
- Guidance, advocacy, and leadership from the LCF team: Masha Cherynak, Samantha Sandoval, Jacqueline Garcel, and
- Mentorship and support in evaluation (Shiree Teng).

The key ingredient binding these components together and making this model far more powerful than the sum of its parts is LCF's creation of a Loving Community—engaging Accelerator participants as a family. Providing mutual encouragement, accountability, and unconditional support, the Accelerator family is culturally grounded and whole-heartedly invested in helping one another succeed.

“It’s not just the amazing events LCF puts on, it’s the individual attention you all put in. In the nonprofit sector, we have that saying, ‘healing the healers.’ I think LCF works hard to help organizations heal. I believe it’s really transformative and groundbreaking work.”

–Accelerator Participant

The nine participants in this inaugural Latino Nonprofit Accelerator cohort are:

- **Chicana Latina Foundation**
Patricia (Patty) Diaz
- **Fathers & Families of San Joaquin**
Sammy Nuñez
- **One Day At a Time (ODAT)**
Johnny Rodriguez
- **Services, Immigrant Rights & Education Network (SIREN)**
Maricela Gutiérrez
- **Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ)**
George Galvis
- **HOMEY** Roberto Eligio Alfaro
- **Faith in the Valley** Trena Turner
- **Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos**
Nane Alejandrez
- **Digital NEST** Jacob Martinez



LATINO NONPROFIT ACCELERATOR COHORT ORGANIZATIONS YEAR ONE



Methodology

This evaluation report draws from the following sources, observations, and experiences:

- Development of theory of change and evaluation metrics
- Interviews with LCF staff and Accelerator organizations³
- Participant observations at learning sessions
- Review of related reports, email exchanges, and blog posts

The evaluators developed a set of metrics to gauge participant organizations' growth in fund development and marketing activity, capacity, and confidence. These are detailed as part of the summary of findings on the following pages.

³ Evaluators spoke with eight of the nine organizations; Johnny Rodriguez of ODAT could not be scheduled within the available time frame.

Findings

Overall, the Accelerator has proven to be not only effective in building the capacity of participant organizations, but an enriching experience because of the unique way in which LCF has carried it out. Following are key themes that emerged in this evaluation.

FINDING:

■ **The central premise of the Accelerator is simple, yet powerful**



Through the Accelerator, LCF seeks to unleash the power of participating organizations by building their branding and fundraising capacity and then creating opportunities for them to get in front of funders.

Our unique recipe is a focus on branding, fundraising, and opening doors of opportunity for visionary Latino nonprofit leaders. We've already learned that when we truly invest in our gamechangers—we can change the game.

– Masha Chernyak, VP Programs and Policy, LCF

It does this by focusing on the essentials: distilling marketing messages down to an easy to digest one-pager; including powerful visuals through high-impact photography and expert design; and building skills through coaching with a fundraising consultant. Cohort participants have learned and grown together, sharing their newly-developed marketing collateral and encouraging one another's efforts. The Accelerator journey culminated in a pitch to funders that incorporated what participants learned about telling a succinct and compelling story.



More than mere mechanics, the Accelerator's unique, culture-informed approach puts people and relationships at the center.



“As a result of being part of the Accelerator, we were able to increase our foundation funding by five times and corporate funding by four times compared to the previous year. Having access to top notch consultants, in developing our website and one-pager and assisting with grant writing, made a big difference in how we messaged and talked about [our organization].”

– Accelerator participant

More than mere mechanics, the Accelerator’s unique, culture-informed approach puts people and relationships at the center. Sharing with one another and with funders in “real talk” circles lifted up participants’ diverse experiences as Latinos and enabled them to see one another’s humanity.

“LCF sets a uniquely familial, equalizing tone. One session was a frank discussion/Q&A with funders and all 40 of us sat in a huge circle. No name placards, no special spots for the funders, no physical distinction between who was who. It led to a very deep and honest discussion.... [It was] illuminating and “a valuable window into certain experiences of the Latino community in California and our country today.”

– Elizabeth Washburn, Principal,
Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation

FINDING:

■ **Readiness and capacity to engage is the single most crucial selection criteria**



Selection for participation in the inaugural Accelerator had five criteria:

1. Readiness and desire to grow;
2. Demonstrated impact;
3. A focus area in Education, Workforce, and/or Civic Engagement;
4. Buy-in for the Accelerator model from organizational leadership, and
5. Deep roots in the Latino community.

Readiness for growth was demonstrated to be critically important, as was having adequate capacity to participate fully. Some participant feedback emphasized the need to understand just what would be expected from the outset.

“Develop a realistic and accountable timeline with outcomes, deadlines, and who is going to do what. While it’s great to think big and have big dreams, there needs to be some clear and realistic expectations from both the organization and consultants.”

– Accelerator participant

To get the most out of this opportunity, participants had to be ready not only to put in the work but also to reap the potential rewards.

“The idea to help organizations go to next level, really grow, worked for [my organization]...my ambition going in was to grow. There are others who don't. [Ask] groups, ‘Hey, what is your ambition? Do you really want to grow?’ If we didn't want to grow, and [the funder] talked with us, that would have reflected bad on LCF. The organizations they choose have to ready to grow. It's not for everybody...”

– Accelerator participant

“As ED, there are always many, many fires to put out. If there is a way to impress upon new cohorts the rare gift this cohort brings and to impress upon them the importance of bringing your best (and worse) self, baring all for the ‘family’ to see, do it. It was when I got really clear on what I knew and did not know and let down guards to trust the facilitators, that my best learning took place.”

– Accelerator participant



FINDING:

■ Expect and plan for staff transitions, especially development directors



Six of the nine, or two-thirds of the participating organizations experienced turnover in their development director positions during the 16-months of the Accelerator; of these, four saw the position vacated more than once. All Accelerator organizations had transitions at some staff level—whether executive leadership, development directors, or other key staff. While such daily struggles for staff retention pose a capacity challenge, particularly for small grassroots nonprofits, all of the organizations exhibited resilience and tenacity in maintaining their efforts and excelled in spite of these setbacks.

Development director turnover is a real challenge for nonprofits, and it occurs for many reasons. In 2013, researchers reported that 50% of nonprofit development directors surveyed anticipated leaving their jobs within two years (the percentage was higher—57%—among development directors at organizations with budgets of \$1 million or less).⁴ These jobs are demanding, often underfunded, and may be unreasonably expected to make up for a lack of overall fundraising culture and/or capacity among the board and other organizational leadership.

4 Underdeveloped: A National Study of Challenges Facing Nonprofit Fundraising, by Jeanne Bell and Marla Cornelius, 2013 (A Joint Project of CompassPoint and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund https://www.compasspoint.org/sites/default/files/documents/UnderDeveloped_CompassPoint_HaasJrFund_January%202013.pdf).

The Accelerator can help mitigate for this volatility by expecting turnover and building this into its design. For example, one participant indicated that, at LCF's encouragement, they invited a board member to attend all the meetings with them, and that this helped communicate

back to the board about all the opportunities coming from LCF." This may be a useful model for all groups to help institutionalize the knowledge gained through the Accelerator across the organization's leadership.

FINDING:

■ **The role of LCF as bridge-builder—as both a partner nonprofit in the movement and conduit and connector to funders—is a strength of this model**



As a relatively small, still-scaling and developing organization itself, LCF shares many of the similar challenges as the groups in the Accelerator. It has found a unique niche, having built a vibrant culture of Latino love, straddling the in-between, bridge-building space as it raises funds from foundations and Latino donors and facilitates connections with other Latino-

led organizations. LCF is playing this role with excellence and devotion. It is able to appreciate and uplift the grassroots groups' assets, yet empathize with their issues and challenges.



“The LCF Team approached each day and each task with such enthusiasm and passion we found it easy to get swept up in the emotions and excitement of each activity. Their belief in the power of our collective effort and the power of these Latinx leaders instilled a sense of pride in the work that we’re doing and pride in the Latinx community. Although we’ve always been proud of our Latinx roots, we don’t think we ever saw us as a cohesive force participating in the nonprofit world. We saw Latinx nonprofits as small disparate groups

engaged in small efforts to improve our own communities. We came away from the LCF Accelerator with a belief that we are a force to be reckoned with. That with cooperation and mutual support, we can have a profound impact not just on our communities, but on a global scale”.

– Accelerator participant

The Demo Day culminating event epitomized this bridge-building role, and participant responses highlight its significance in the Accelerator experience. As the vehicle for the organizations' pitches to funders, Demo Day was—just as importantly—a celebration of all their work leading to that point.

LCF set the tone by inviting a dance group to kick off the evening with an energizing performance, and all attendees got to vote on the best pitches of the night. Every organization received \$5,000 in additional funding, but the big winner was One Day At A Time (ODAT), whose Community Engagement Lead and former program participant, Jose Cordon gave a spoken-word inspired pitch that touched hearts and brought down the house. Awarded first place, Jose said: *"It was an honor to represent ODAT at LCF's Demo Day and a privilege to share the stage with such amazing leaders. Winning the \$25,000 was a great moment, because I was able to partly return the favor to an organization that has invested so much in me."*

In all, LCF invested an additional \$65,000 in unrestricted funds and helped leverage \$2.5 million in new funding for participating organizations over the course of the 16-month Accelerator, in part from donors in LCF's Latino Giving Circle Network. Further, the value of the pitches will be extended as video recordings are provided to participating organizations for use on their websites and social media.

"I felt like I was a part of a greater family with love and support that can only be found in true community. We laughed, we cried, we enjoyed each other's wins, shared in the joys of new life and mourned the transition of friends. Knowing that you have family pulling for you, striving with you is everything. The confidence found through the love and support of this cohort was true gift and blessing."

– Accelerator participant

FINDING:

■ **The Accelerator is unique in bringing funders to the table as mentors, supporters, and people**

The bridge-building that LCF has done through the Accelerator has been not only to help create connections between cohort organizations and funders and donors, but to engage philanthropic leaders at a fundamentally human level, allowing them to see—and be seen—as people, each with a history of their own glories as well as agonies.

Participants described this component as uniquely valuable and as a strength for the Accelerator to build upon.

“More than anything, spend more time as a group, go somewhere, sit down and have an hour with mentors as part of our day... not 20-30 minutes. Nice to have more time to build relationships with folks. The circle with funders was great, stellar! I have never seen that. Bringing people together was a key.”

– Accelerator participant



This was enabled through a talking circle format, where funders have fully participated as equals—not sitting on a raised dais or positioned as panelists, but side-by-side and shoulder-to-shoulder with the grassroots leaders—sharing stories.

“This experience has been one of the most impactful relationships we have had...”

– Accelerator participant

Humanizing these relationships breaks down the all-to-familiar opaque screens from which funders often operate behind. Having funders show up as mentors, as givers of feedback, and as people, has lubricated the human-to-human connections that prove that personal relationships are at the heart of fundraising.

“It’s rare to get the real story when you’re a funder. Nonprofit leaders who are struggling to keep their organizations viable don’t often risk their funding by telling program officers how philanthropy is letting them down. But at this LCF session, nonprofit leaders were able to share their truth—truth I needed to hear.”

– Foundation Senior Director

FINDING:

■ LCF’s “La Cultura Cura” (culture cures) philosophy is the secret sauce that makes the Accelerator what it is



Leading with love and culture, LCF promotes camaraderie and unity among the cohort. In addition to finding expression in a Healing Circle closing one of the cultural retreat sessions, this love for the Latino culture, ancestry and roots shows up in each and every

interaction, manifesting itself as a commitment to the Accelerator cohort.

Participants spoke to the critical difference this made to them—the difference of being fully seen, heard, respected, and supported and of reciprocating this love and support to others.

“I had opportunities to support other organizations. There’s something generative about that...sow and reap. It’s beneficial for organizations to give and support others. That shifts the mindset about the team.”

–Accelerator participant

“My favorite part was being able to be in a room with so many community leaders within Northern California.”

It brought an energy and a spirit to the work that we do, being able to reconnect and create new relationships amongst peers was very healing.”

–Accelerator participant

This rooted in deep love and culture approach distinguishes LCF as a new type of funder: one that is unafraid to be as passionate as they are willing to be deeply personal and relational.

FINDING:

■ Progress toward fundraising and marketing goals shows significant results



At the end of the 16-month cohort, participants were expected to demonstrate higher levels of fund development and marketing activity,

capacity, and confidence. On the following page is a summary of progress toward each evaluation metric.

- **75% of the organizations will submit at least three new LOIs, 1 full proposal to a funder, and secure at least one new in-person meeting with a funder.**

Participants exceeded this goal, reporting a robust level of activity. A couple of Accelerator participants said they were uncertain whether to attribute all activity to the Accelerator, or if much of it would have occurred anyway. Another reported having met with “over 100 funders” during the year—surely a major benchmark.

“As a result of being part of the accelerator, we were able to increase our foundation funding by five times and corporate funding by four times compared to the previous year. Having access to top notch consultants in developing our website and one-pager and assisting with grant writing, made a big difference in how we messaged and talked about [our organization]. Additionally, for our corporate supporters we were able to move from solely Gala sponsorship to both sponsorship and grant.”

–Accelerator participant

- **85% of the organizations will finalize a fundraising plan developed in partnership with board support, LCF and organizational leadership, and the fund development coach.**

Only 25% of participants met this goal. Several reported having difficulty spending time with the fund development consultant. One participant echoed others in saying that it was “unrealistic to think that one or two consultants can work with the entire cohort,” suggesting that there was not enough fundraising assistance, in particular, to go around.

“Have more than one consultant for each category in the beginning, if the size of the cohort will be ten organizations, to ensure each organization receives the well-intended time. It was challenging to be able to schedule and follow through with some of the consultants.”

– Accelerator participant

- **100% of cohort participants will have tangible marketing collateral and updated communications to support their fundraising and outreach efforts; the branding efforts will be rooted in an asset-based language that supports long-term racial justice efforts.**

Participants met this goal. However, feedback indicates that the process was more successful, effective, and smooth for some (80%) than for others (20%) for whom it took more time, more work than they'd anticipated, and required direct support from LCF staff who had to step in when needed. Even so, comments indicate how valuable the Accelerator has been to participants. One described how

they have embraced and internalized their new messaging: "Our mantra has been used, [it's] very in-play, becoming institutionalized, integrated into our work—a powerful piece of our agency."

Several comments gave credit to the consultants and the level of expertise and support they offered.

"[A favorite part of the Accelerator was] the one-to-one consultation/coaching we received from the consultants. These are talented and expert consultants that we would not have been able to afford on our own, and they are very committed in seeing you succeed."

– Accelerator participant





“The part that LCF has done is boosting confidence. Mantra: ‘you deserve it, this is why the money is there, your work is important.’ ”

–Accelerator Participant

- **100% will sharpen their external messaging, including clear mission and impact statements.**

Participants met this goal. However, feedback indicated differences in experience depending on the organization’s internal capacity. As one stated, “this is all still new,” echoing others who expressed the sense that it is still a work in progress. Another comment spoke to the value of working in a cohort as they develop their communications capacity.

“What’s helpful about the mission conversation is how we present the organization.... [It’s] helpful to hear others present and how they talk about it. Dialogue has been helpful to solidify how concise we are and to present it in a powerful manner.”

– Accelerator participant

- **75% of the organizations will attribute new funding support to clear messaging and stronger proposals.**

Overall, it is still too soon to say whether this goal was met. Some participants noted a “slight difference” so far. One spoke specifically to the increased level of confidence in their funding requests.

“It’s confidence in what I’m doing and what I’m talking about—the part that LCF has done is boosting confidence. Mantra: ‘you deserve it, this is why the money is there, your work is important.’ That’s the script.... Going in to a meeting with funders is golden. [There’s] not another place that I was getting that from.”

– Accelerator participant

- **100% of cohort participants will feel more hopeful about their organization’s future, mitigating individual burnout and increasing their circle of support.**

Participants met this goal. Some comments spoke to the cohort structure as being important to the development of a “collective consciousness,” the value of “peer-to-peer exchange,” and the opportunity to “learn from other groups and sharpen skills.”

“The LCF Team approached each day and each task with such enthusiasm and passion we found it easy to get swept up in the emotions and excitement of each activity. Their belief in the power of our collective effort and the power of these Latinx leaders instilled a sense of pride in the work that we’re doing and pride in the Latinx community. Although we’ve always been proud of our Latinx roots, we don’t think we ever saw us as a cohesive force participating in the nonprofit world. We saw Latinx nonprofits as small disparate groups engaged in small efforts to improve our own communities. We came away from the LCF Accelerator with a belief that we are a force to be reckoned with. That with cooperation and mutual support, we can have a profound impact not just on our communities, but on a global scale.”

– Accelerator participant

“[There’s] not that many Latino EDs doing nonprofit work, so it’s great for me to hear from them, how they’re thriving and surviving.”

– Accelerator participant

Some feedback spoke in similarly positive terms, but included reservations about challenging gender dynamics and perceptions about who may be considered “favorites” by LCF.

“[This] has been the strongest and most impactful for the team, the relationship building—even though we knew each other, [to] check in on how we’re doing. Some know each other really well: the male EDs... Sometimes [I feel I’m] infringing on their men-space. There were three female EDs, and it helped me to hang out with and get to know them.”

– Accelerator participant

“[It’s] a bit awkward in the sense that at least four groups knew each other really well...all did similar work. That energy at times was intimidating, or they controlled the room a bit (though it was not their intention). For us who are new to that.... But now I have some new allies, even if our work is different from theirs.”

– Accelerator participant



- **80% will be more confident in pitching funders, corporations, and individual donors for funding support.**

Participants *doubled* their sense of confidence and met this goal. Several shared freely about how the experience built their confidence and changed their thinking, even if they felt they had experience before, indicating that they all got what they needed out of it.

"[Being] put on the spot to pitch, how we present in the most impactful and convincing manner, was a key for our growth. We've grown so much, we can talk about ten different things. [They've done an] amazing job to prepare us! So I'd say it has boosted our confidence. These types of challenges to come up with something in a short amount of time, it's good...to get feedback from our peers, so helpful."

– Accelerator participant

"I always thought I was good at that, now I feel so much more confidence to bring it home.... I've sharpened, know what I know and what I don't."

– Accelerator participant

Some of these comments spoke to the importance of having LCF as an ally and in increased sense of being able to ask more directly for what they really need.

“My relationship with LCF went very deep through this process. I feel I have confidence when I speak with funders to say LCF is a major supporter, an ally, and they can vouch for my work. It’s important for other foundations to hear that...”

– Accelerator participant

“[It] gave me the confidence to ask for what I feel we’re worth instead of what I think they’ll fund.... Instead of doing that, what LCF did for me was [to get me thinking] ‘how much do you need and why aren’t you asking for that.’ When you ask big, you get big. It changed my way of thinking about how to ask, and also how much to ask, and the confidence to know our organization was worthy of asking for the money.”

– Accelerator participant

- **80% of cohort participants will expand their networks, securing a path toward sustainability and smart growth.**

The Accelerator has, by design, enabled participants to develop a peer network as well as relationships with funders.



“[The] different coaches we’ve met, mentors, funders LCF exposed us to... [they’ve done a] great job to bring a lot of folks to circles we’ve had. Even the consultants...[have pointed to] resources we can access when we need to expand our work. The LCF team is phenomenal...super strong women! Amazing. All of them are really inspiring.”

– Accelerator participant

Additional feedback from Accelerator participants regarding the overall experience and any suggestions for future rounds included several comments simply appreciating the uniqueness of this opportunity and wishing for it to continue.

“LCF’s Accelerator that shows you the ‘how’ to the ‘what’ [of fundraising]. I don’t think [others] know how to bring that to a group...[have the] recipe like LCF has. They will tick things off, ‘think of a funder, this and that,’ the logistics. But LCF puts the meat on the bones: why, how you do this.”

–Accelerator participant

“Phenomenal, second to none. I don’t want them to change a single thing that they did.”

–Accelerator participant

“It’s crucial that they continue doing what they do in the ways they do it.”

–Accelerator participant

Others indicated a desire to see the model developed even more to include greater depth or a more extended period of support.

“Deeper dives into training topics, twice to practice pitch, more feedback from Juan Carlos.... Ivy to do more fundraising training beyond the initial session; add a lot more to that fundraising piece.”

–Accelerator participant

“They planted the seed, but not enough water. If you start a business, it will take about three years. To start this and drop it in one year? They want to support others, I understand that. [The difference] when you get one-year or three-year funding: three years allows you to mobilize and move, [with] one year by the time you’re done, you’ve just started.”

–Accelerator participant

In sum the Accelerator is powerful in its basic design, in the dedication and competence with which it has been delivered, and in the transformative way it leads with love.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings from the Latino Nonprofit Accelerator's inaugural cohort, we offer the following recommendations for future development:

- 1. Take more time to ramp up and select the next cohort.** Get to know the internal capacity and commitments required to participate in and get the most out of the Accelerator experience. Be more stringent about organizational readiness as a selection criterion. Be clear and upfront about the required investment of staff time. Participants need to have baseline existing capacity to absorb and build capacity.
- 2. Pay attention to cohort dynamics in cultivating a shared space.** Spend more time to gel the cohort through storytelling and sharing of participants' personal and professional journeys. Recognize that some may already know each other well, potentially leaving others feeling like outsiders. Consider how gender, as well as having non-Latinx leaders in the space, influences group dynamics, belonging, and participation.
- 3. Build the expectation of staff turnover into the model.** Anticipate that there will be turnover of staff, in particular development directors and/or other staff with fundraising leadership responsibilities. Build this into the design, such as by intentionally expanding the number of participants (including board members) from each organization.
- 4. Test a demand-side approach to sourcing consultants.** Give groups the funds to hire their own fundraising consultants that are not prescribed by LCF. Have a list of "preferred" and trusted providers instead of having one prescribed provider for which they all have to compete for time and attention.
- 5. Extend the Accelerator timeframe,** as one year is a very short amount of time to build capacity, impart knowledge, and strengthen skills and to put all that into practice. Participants expressed a desire to continue as an alumni network, perhaps meeting once or twice a year to continue the community they've built, and to offer insights, build with and mentor the next cohort.
- 6. Build LCF's own capacity so it's pouring from a filled cup.** Set aside adequate resources for and pay attention to building the capacity of LCF itself so it can continue to play this important leadership role as openly and creatively as it has done so to date. As a developing, yet still small organization, LCF deserves and needs to shore up its own internal capacity and avoid burning out its staff.

Conclusion

LCF staff has done an effective and outstanding job to initiate the Latino Nonprofit Accelerator. The pilot was successful in both meeting the needs of the inaugural cohort, proving the theory of change the program tested but also in uplifting critical lessons for how to deepen and strengthen further Accelerator initiatives especially as the program expands to new communities and models.

By all measures, the nine participant organizations have excelled in boosting their confidence to raise funds, accompanied by visually stunning collateral and succinct descriptions of why they matter. But more importantly the dedication, love, and competence with which the Accelerator was delivered were transformative for everyone involved. The relationships built through this program will continue to spread seeds of change throughout our movement long after the end of the pilot.

Over time, this style and approach of capacity building investment has unlimited potential to strengthen Latino-led organizations and to become a model for funders invested in the capacity and confidence of other communities of change makers. The power and potential of the Latino Nonprofit Accelerator has only just begun to spread its wings to fly.

*“Being part of the Accelerator made me and those who came with me feel important and accepted. When I walked into an event with LCF, I always felt welcome and loved. Our opinions listened to and we were given the floor to speak at a few major functions that the organization hosted. I feel very at home at LCF and as if I am walking into familia and community. **If there is an added value in what LCF does, its make nonprofits feel that they matter.** I always felt positive and excited to contribute to my community after any LCF event. The Accelerator also engaged me to really think and change the game at my own organization. It made me feel great and it was a very positive experience. I have stated this before its really not about the money, it’s about the connections and impact we can have together. I do believe you need capital to help move your organization forward, but there is also something to be said about creating a network of people that build a long-lasting bond of relationships that will endure over time.” ■*

The Learning and Evaluation team thanks the following Accelerator participants for your time, insights, candor and commitment to uplift the Latinx community:

- **Nane Alejandre** Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos
- **Roberto Eligio Alfaro** Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth (HOMEY)
- **Masha Cherynak** Latino Community Foundation
- **Patty Diaz** Chicana Latina Foundation
- **Ivy Fairchild** Fundraising Consultant
- **George Galvis** Communities United for Youth Restorative Justice (CURYJ)
- **Maricela Gutierrez** Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN)
- **Jacob Martinez** Digital Nest
- **Sammy Nuñez** Fathers and Families of San Joaquin
- **Trena Turner** Faith in the Valley



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