

“Más Información”

An Information Needs Assessment
of Latino Immigrants in Oakland California



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Information needs assessments can help provide a snapshot of how information moves through a community, what issues are most important to residents, and how best to expand the news conversation to a diverse audience. The goal of this assessment is to identify what kinds of efforts exist to both get and share news and information with local residents specific to their communities, and to share examples of news engagement projects in other communities that might be useful or instructive to community groups in Oakland.

This information needs assessment is supported by a grant from the [Listening Post Collective](#), a project of [Internews](#). Internews is a non-profit international media development organization whose mission is to ensure access to trusted, quality information that empowers people to have a voice in their future and to live healthy, secure, and rewarding lives. The Listening Post Collective is an Internews initiative aimed at addressing information needs of underserved communities across the United States.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Madeleine Bair led the fieldwork for this assessment and compiled this report. Madeleine is an Oakland native with 15 years of experience in journalism, media innovation, and human rights documentation. This information needs assessment is the initial project of [El Tímpano](#)—an initiative Madeleine founded in 2017 to develop two-way channels of communication to better inform, engage, and empower this community. This information needs assessment was supported by numerous peers and partner organizations, which are named in the Acknowledgments section at the end of the report.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 2016 election, fear has intensified among many immigrant communities. Rhetoric from Trump’s campaign singled out immigrants as to blame them for various ills afflicting the country. Once in office, the current administration wasted no time to change immigration enforcement priorities, sending a clear message that all undocumented immigrants should consider themselves at risk of detention and deportation.

At the same time, “fake news” and misinformation have flooded communities across the U.S., including immigrant communities. False reports about visa requirements for visitors from Latin America spread rapidly on social media, while rumors of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids continue to spark fear and mistrust. At the start of the Trump administration, organizations across the country reported that immigrant clients were avoiding health clinics, legal appointments, and outreach events for fear that participating would put them at risk of being detained.

At a time when local news and information is critical to cover these issues and disseminate verified information to affected residents, Latino immigrants have dwindling options for local news. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center report, there were just four dailies serving Spanish-speaking immigrants across the U.S., down from 35 in 2002. And while digital “hyperlocal” news initiatives have flourished in recent years across the country, immigrant communities have been left behind.

Ethnic news outlets have been a part of the country’s media landscape since the 1700s,

with local and national publications serving new waves of first-generation immigrants in their own languages, from German and English to Bangladeshi, Yiddish, and Chinese. Yet in the past 15 years, many ethnic news publications have struggled with dwindling ad revenue and changing media consumption habits. Outlets that rely on a small staff often lack the resources to innovate and incorporate new reporting methods and business models. Just last fall, New America Media—the country’s foremost advocate for ethnic media, which had founded and supported many publications of its own—closed down.

The struggles of the ethnic press have great implications for civic engagement and democracy. In California, 45% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. In many cities and towns, the number is even higher. And yet many of these residents lack a source for verified news and information, or a way to make their voices and stories heard.

In the wake of the 2016 election and the examination of local news that it inspired, we wanted to take a look at the role of the local press and other channels in providing news, information, and a voice for Latino communities in one diverse city.

From March 2017 through February 2018, members of El Tímpano—a local community journalism start-up—talked with more than two dozen community leaders and approximately 300 residents of Oakland, California, to understand how the city’s Latino immigrants are getting information they need, how they are participating in civic dialogue, and how they are included or left out. We focused on monolingual Spanish- and Mam-speaking residents, as for them, language alone is a significant barrier to news, information,

and civic engagement. This “information ecosystem assessment” set out to explore the issues most important to these immigrants, and how connected they feel to sources and networks that keep them informed about those issues.

This assessment considers the existing news media landscape and other efforts underway to inform Oakland’s Latino and Mam indigenous immigrant communities and amplify their voices on civic and national affairs. It outlines particular challenges to informing and engaging these communities, as well as the assets and opportunities they have. Finally, it shares a few examples of news engagement projects in other places that may be useful or instructive to media, municipal, and community groups serving Oakland’s diverse communities.

This report is not meant to claim any exhaustive conclusion about information flow among Oakland’s Latino immigrants. Rather, it is designed to share insights from stakeholders and residents surveyed about how the city’s Latino immigrant community is covered, informed, and engaged by local media and other sources, and to provide a snapshot of the media and information flow in the city.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From our immersive research, interviews with community leaders, surveys of residents, and series of group workshops, several main themes emerged that point to ways the local media landscape can and must evolve to more successfully inform and engage Oakland’s Latino immigrants as well as the city’s small but growing community of indigenous Guatemalan Mam immigrants. The following are our key takeaways:

DEARTH OF LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION

In our conversations with Latino immigrants and community leaders who directly engage with this community, there were several sentiments we heard time and time again. The most common perspective was perhaps best summed up by Pastor Pablo Morataya, the pastor of Primer Iglesia Hispana Presbiteriana:

“Hay carencia, limitación, de información—información adecuada, realista, lo más cercano a la realidad de la comunidad inmigrante.”

“There is a dearth, a limitation, of information—information that is adequate, realistic, and relevant to the reality of the immigrant community.”

Every community leader we spoke with articulated the paucity of information about local issues relevant to Latino immigrants. Survey respondents and workshop participants expressed the same sentiment, stating “No tengo información” (“I don’t have information”) or “No se dónde conseguir información” (“I don’t know where to find information”) on issues that are important to them. “Más información” (“More information”) was one of the most common survey responses to the question, “What would you change about the local news media?”

MEDIA SPARKS FEAR

It’s not that there are no sources of news and information for Oakland’s Latino immigrant community, but the outlets that exist are limited and have many shortcomings. The only news sources commonly cited by survey respondents were commercial Spanish-language outlets. Television is the primary source, but numerous residents say they no longer watch the news because it leaves them feeling afraid and disempowered. “It’s like the media silences people instead of giving them a voice,” said Emma Paulino, a community organizer with Oakland Community Organizations, explaining that the news broadcasts one negative story after another without equipping viewers with information they can use to take action. “It’s really demoralizing to see that the access people have to information is commercial TV,” she added. She was one of several people who expressed a concern that the news may do more harm than good by broadcasting a barrage of negative stories and habitually depicting immigrants as victims.

PEOPLE WANT NEWS THEY CAN USE... INCLUDING INFORMATION ON BASIC RESOURCES

“I want news that helps me take action rather than leaving me feeling defeated and helpless,” said a speaker at a Cinco de Mayo State of Latinos panel discussion when asked about the role of news in empowering the Latino community. As his response implies, the answer to negative news is not necessarily positive news, but empowering news—resources or information that the news consumer can use to make decisions or take action.

In workshops, participants discussed the issues that were most important to them. Education, health, housing, employment, and the illegal dumping of trash in their neighborhoods were always at the top of that list. Participants said they wanted resources and information that allow them to better engage on those issues. Such information could include detailed outlines of policy proposals, guidance on how to sign their children up for summer classes, and what to do if they are injured at work.

COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS & STRONG SOCIAL NETWORKS ADDRESS INFORMATION NEEDS

Residents told us that the main way they stay informed and engaged on issues important to them is through trusted community institutions such as churches, schools, grassroots organizations, libraries, and community health clinics. Information from those sources is primarily disseminated through social networks, in-person events, and word of mouth.

While trust in news media appears to be low, old-fashioned social networks serve as key hubs for sharing information among Oakland’s Latino immigrants. In our research, we found dozens of residents eager to be engaged and involved in their community, and who do so by taking considerable time each month to attend meetings where they connect with neighbors, speak directly to city officials, and engage on issues impacting their families, neighborhoods, and communities.

INDIGENOUS MAM INFORMATION NEEDS

Despite more than a decade of growth among Oakland’s Mam Mayan indigenous community, there are virtually no resources catering to their particular linguistic needs, leaving many monolingual Mam people without any local information. As one Mam resident told us in describing his family members who speak neither Spanish nor English, “Simplemente no se informan” (“They are simply uninformed”).

NO CENTRAL SOURCE FOR TIMELY, LOCAL INFORMATION

In the case of an emergency, it is unclear how urgent information would be disseminated among Oakland’s Spanish- and Mam-speaking immigrants. Many channels used for crisis response by municipal agencies and civic organizations, such as email, Twitter, and NextDoor, are not frequently utilized by Latino and indigenous immigrants. Grassroots organizations that do have strong ties to the community by and large lack the capacity to translate, verify, and disseminate information in a timely way. In a region vulnerable to earthquakes and fires, this lack of a central and relied upon source for Spanish- and Mam-language news threatens the ability to respond to emergency situations, notify Latino immigrants of events and policy updates, and debunk rumors.

FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THEIR STORIES

Local news media has the responsibility to inform a community. It also has the responsibility to represent the diversity of stories, opinions, and voices reflective of a community. Yet we found that there are few opportunities for Oakland’s Latino and indigenous Mam immigrants to exert their voices in local civic conversations. The news outlets they consume most—commercial television stations—are based elsewhere in the Bay Area, and are not generally perceived as a space for residents to share their stories. Furthermore, many public forums organized to provide a space for residents to voice their concerns exclude the Latino immigrant community. As Pastor Morataya said,

“Hay muchas personas que tienen mucho que decir, pero no tienen la oportunidad de decirlo.”

“There are many people who have a lot to say, but they don’t have the opportunity to say it.”

Many of the pressing issues that emerged in conversations with community leaders and residents are absent or under-reported in the news media, and unaddressed by the larger community.

LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN OAKLAND

Located directly across the bay from San Francisco, Oakland, population 420,000, is one of the anchor cities of the metropolitan Bay Area. The port city’s industrial roots have long attracted working-class people from across the country and around the world. This confluence of cultures has contributed to the city’s reputation for diversity, creativity, and political activism.

In the past 15 years, the city’s demographics have undergone significant changes, with the recession of 2008 and the skyrocketing cost of rent pushing many working-class residents out. For decades, African Americans made up the largest ethnicity in the city, with a high of 47 percent of the population in 1980. In 2010, after thousands lost their homes in the foreclosure crisis, African Americans made up just 28 percent of the population, and since then their share of the population has continued to fall. Every other racial group, though, has grown in size, with Latinos increasing more than any other group. As of 2016, whites made up 28% of Oakland’s population, followed by Hispanics at 26%, African Americans at 23%, and Asians at 16%.

Violent crime has plagued the city and its reputation for decades. From the 1980s until the early 2000s, Oakland’s per capita murder rate was among the highest in the nation. In the past 5 years, homicides and other forms of violent crime have steadily dropped, though violent crime remains high in certain neighborhoods of West and Deep East Oakland.

The relentless growth of Silicon Valley, and the inability of the region’s cities to keep up with the growing demand for housing has led to soaring housing costs. [According to Curbed](#), between 2012 and 2017, Oakland rent prices shot up 51 percent—the second-highest increase in the nation. The impact of this can be seen in growing homelessness as well as hazardous overcrowding as more and more people find shelter in converted garages, warehouses, and other unsafe situations. This crisis received national attention when [a fire broke out at a warehouse party in 2016](#), killing 36 people at the precariously assembled live-work space.

Oakland’s Latino community was originally centered just west of downtown. After WWII, an “urban renewal” project associated with the construction of the Nimitz Freeway uprooted that community, and many Latinos settled in the Fruitvale district 5 miles to the southeast. This neighborhood remains the cultural and commercial heart of Oakland’s Latino community, with a mass of churches, shops, health clinics, social service agencies, and civic institutions all catering to Latinos. As the Latino immigrant population has grown, the community has settled throughout East Oakland. Today, Fruitvale and the two Oakland zip codes to the south—often referred to as “Deep East Oakland”—are all majority Latino, while they were predominantly African-American in the past. As the lowest-paid ethnic group in the Bay Area, Latinos are particularly vulnerable to poverty, evictions, overcrowding, and other fallouts from the high cost of rent.

While many of Oakland’s Latino residents have roots in Oakland and the U.S. dating back decades or generations, the city has continued to receive new immigrants

from Latin America. Oakland is the 2nd largest recipient of Central American unaccompanied minors in California, after Los Angeles. One of the newest and rapidly growing immigrant groups in the past 15 years has been Mam indigenous people from Guatemala. Many Mam adults speak little to no English or Spanish. It is hard to track down numbers on the size of this community, but local schools, health clinics, courts, and other direct service organizations report increased demand for Mam interpreters. Low literacy levels and a history of oppression in their home country makes outreach to this community particularly challenging. *(Editor’s Note: For the purpose of simplicity, this report generally uses the term “Latino immigrant,” yet our focus includes Mam immigrants, many of whom describe themselves not as “Latino” but as “indigenous.”)*

It’s impossible to discuss the Latino immigrant community’s feeling of connection with local issues and information without discussing immigration status, particularly at a time when federal authorities are vowing to crack down on anyone in the country illegally. According to a 2015 report on newcomer immigrants in Alameda County prepared by Community Health for Asian Americans, East Oakland has one of the highest rates of unauthorized immigrants in the county. “An estimated 35% of all children residing in East Oakland have at least one unauthorized parent.” Being undocumented, however, does not mean lacking roots in the community. According to the same report, on average, unauthorized immigrants in East Oakland have resided in the U.S. just shy of a decade.

Officials in Oakland and Alameda County have taken a proactive approach to protecting immigrants regardless of documentation status, but have acknowledged the challenge of doing so during a climate of fear and mistrust. Shortly after the election of Donald Trump, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors set aside funds to support a rapid response network to address potential raids by immigration authorities. The network involves several local immigrant advocacy organizations, which have conducted know-your-rights trainings for immigrants and have trained allies to witness, verify, and document reported actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The city has prohibited the police department from coordinating with ICE officers, and Mayor Libby Schaaf received national attention in the spring of 2018 for warning the immigrant community of an impending ICE raid. However, the Alameda County sheriff, who oversees the local jail, has been accused by immigrant advocates of coordinating with ICE to hand detainees over to immigration agents. These conflicting approaches by local law enforcement have left many immigrants in a state of uncertainty and concern.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This report is based on nine months of collaborative research, during which time we met with community leaders, facilitated small group workshops, and surveyed hundreds of residents. Our aim was to understand how monolingual Spanish- and Mam-speaking immigrants are informed and engaged on issues that impact them, and what challenges and opportunities there might be to address information gaps.

CONVERSATIONS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

We met with leaders of 19 community-based organizations or institutions that work with Oakland’s Latino immigrant community. These included libraries, churches, schools, health clinics, legal advocacy groups, a women’s empowerment organization, an economic development agency, a cultural center, and other civic engagement organizations. Our conversations broadly covered the following questions:

- How does your organization engage with Latino immigrants? What works effectively, and what are particular challenges of informing and engaging this community?
- Where do the Latino immigrants you work with get news and information?

The research originally focused on monolingual Spanish-speaking immigrants, but as we learned about the growth of Oakland’s indigenous Mam community, we broadened our research to include their specific information needs.

In many cases, we also discussed the local news media and its coverage of and for Latino immigrants, as well as accounts of rumors and misinformation. In addition to leaders who are a part of Oakland’s Latino immigrant community, we also spoke with a city councilperson, a communications manager for the City of Oakland, and leaders from national immigration advocacy organizations. This outreach centered on garnering a broader understanding of how these entities identify and address the challenges of reaching this target community.

SURVEYS

For two months, we distributed surveys to hear directly from Spanish- and Mam-speaking Oakland residents. Thanks in part to feedback from a local library branch manager, an original 5-page survey was revised to be short, engaging, and easy to fill out. We provided pre-selected checkbox options, as well as space for open-ended responses. The surveys asked:

- What issues are most important to you? The checkbox options were: health, education, immigration, employment, housing, discrimination, public safety, local politics, and “other.”
- Where do you get news and information on issues important to you? The checkbox options were: radio, TV, newspaper, website, friend/neighbor/colleague, text, WhatsApp, Facebook, NextDoor, Twitter, church, lawyer, library, community meetings, and “other.”
- If you could change one thing about the local news media, what would you change?

“MÁS INFORMACIÓN”:

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A resident fills out a survey after service at the Primera Iglesia Presbiteriana Hispana church.

Respondents were invited to share their phone number if they wanted to participate in the design and launch of El Tímpano—a local news initiative based in part on the results of the survey.

We surveyed residents in person at various events and community centers, often engaging respondents in conversation if they had the time and interest in expanding on their answers. In a handful of cases where respondents had trouble reading and writing, we helped them fill out the survey. We conducted surveys at Fruitvale’s popular Day of the Dead street festival, in the lobby of a public library, at a mobile food bank, at churches, and other locations frequented by Latino and Mam immigrants. At a church catering to Guatemalan immigrants, a native Mam speaker assisted congregants who spoke Mam fill out the survey. In total, we collected responses from 268 individuals.

EL TÍMPANO ESCUCHA Y AMPLÍA LA VOZ DE LA COMUNIDAD HISPANA DE OAKLAND.
Con el apoyo del Listening Post Collective de Interviews

SU HISTORIA ES IMPORTANTE. SU VOZ TAMBIÉN.

Queremos escucharle. Cuáles asuntos son más importantes para usted?

<input type="checkbox"/> Salud y acceso a asistencia médica	<input type="checkbox"/> Discriminación y relaciones entre razas
<input type="checkbox"/> Educación y escuelas	<input type="checkbox"/> Diversas
<input type="checkbox"/> Trabajo, acceso de trabajo y derechos laborales	<input type="checkbox"/> Seguridad pública y agerites policiales
<input type="checkbox"/> Política de inmigración	<input type="checkbox"/> Política local
<input type="checkbox"/> Costo de renta y derechos de inquilinos	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro (qué nos falta?) _____

Dónde consigue información sobre asuntos que son importantes para usted y su comunidad?

<input type="checkbox"/> Radio	<input type="checkbox"/> WhatsApp	<input type="checkbox"/> Biblioteca
<input type="checkbox"/> TV	<input type="checkbox"/> Facebook	<input type="checkbox"/> Reuniones en la comunidad
<input type="checkbox"/> Periódico	<input type="checkbox"/> NextDoor	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro (qué nos falta?) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sitio de Web	<input type="checkbox"/> Twitter	
<input type="checkbox"/> Amigo/Vecino/Colega	<input type="checkbox"/> Iglesia	
<input type="checkbox"/> Texto	<input type="checkbox"/> Abogado	

EL TÍMPANO

SI PUDIERA CAMBIAR ALGO ACERCA DE LAS PRÁCTICAS DE LAS NOTICIAS LOCALES, QUE CAMBIARÍA?

SI LE INTERESA PARTICIPAR EN EL TÍMPANO PARA RECIBIR INFORMACIÓN Y CONTAR SU HISTORIA A TRAVÉS DE MENSAJES DE TEXTO, ESCRIBA SU NUMERO DE TELÉFONO AQUI:

EL TÍMPANO

Surveys were designed like greeting cards to be inviting and easy to fill out.

WORKSHOPS

In partnership with local organizations, we facilitated five small group workshops, reaching a total of 50 residents. The sessions ranged from 30 to 70 minutes, and were structured to address the same questions as the survey. The group setting allowed for more nuanced discussions

around issues of trust in media and what participants wanted to see in local news. The workshops were carried out in partnership with Mujeres Unidas y Activas and Oakland Community Organizations—grassroots groups that opened their regularly scheduled meetings to El Tímpano.

At a group workshop, community members use colored stickers to indicate what sources they rely upon for news and information.



IMMERSION

In addition to interviews, surveys, and workshops, we spent several months observing the formal and informal channels used by Latino immigrant communities, and Oakland residents as a whole, to share information and participate in civic conversations. We attended meetings on local issues organized by church groups,

“know your rights” trainings organized by advocacy organizations, meetings of neighborhood crime prevention councils, forums convened by civic engagement organizations and city council members, and a public town hall on the issue of downtown development.

LOCAL INFORMATION LANDSCAPE

The information landscape refers to the infrastructure that supports information production and flow. This includes media outlets and distribution systems, as well as other institutions and networks that produce and share information, including government agencies and civil society.

SPANISH-LANGUAGE TELEVISION

Univisión & Telemundo

Spanish-language television news was by far the top source of news and information for residents we surveyed, with 62% of respondents identifying television news as a common source of information. Radio was cited as a common source by 36% of respondents, and websites by 26%. This means that generally, when people described “las noticias,” they were describing Spanish-language television news. When asked, respondents referenced both Univision and Telemundo, the top national Spanish-language networks. Both have daily Bay Area news broadcasts from their studios in San Jose. Univisión has a local morning wake-up show and two local half-hour evening news broadcasts. Telemundo has two half-hour local news broadcasts in the evening. Both cover the 9-county metropolitan region.

Since these two outlets were the top source of news among those we spoke with, they were also the target of widespread criticism. The most common complaints were that the news is:

- **Too negative.** As Fernando Estrada, a union organizer, put it, “If it’s not something bad, they don’t make much of an effort.” Numerous survey respondents expressed their frustration by such negativity. They wished that “no hablen tan mal de Oakland” (they wouldn’t speak so bad of Oakland”) and that the news would have “menos violencia” (“less violence”).
- **Sensational and uninformative.** Several survey respondents called the news “amarilla,” or sensationalistic “yellow journalism”. Many attributed that to the fact that it’s commercial, so outlets are more concerned with attracting viewers and ad revenue than with providing information as a public service. “No es muy útil. Es más entretenimiento” (“It’s not very useful. It’s more entertainment”). One person expressed a desire for “una fuente verdadera y con más información,” (“A truthful outlet with more information”).
- **Untrustworthy.** The perception of commercial media as sensational bleeds into a belief that facts are not its top priority. “Sabes que no es información concreta” (“you know it’s not real information”), one resident said. Two community organizers recalled experiences of the news media sharing false information, such as when someone who presented himself as a lawyer on TV gave incorrect information about immigration policy. Survey respondents commonly gave remarks indicating their suspicion of the media’s veracity and motives. These are some

answers in response to the question, “How you would change the local news media?”:

“A veces es pura mentira.”

“Sometimes it’s pure lies.”

“Que sean realistas y que se enfoquen en los hechos no en mentiras!”

“(I wish) they were more realistic and that they would focus more on the facts and not on lies.”

“Que fueran más sinceras!”

“(I wish) they were more truthful!”

- **Fear-inducing.** Many people described the impact the news has on their psyche. As a woman stated during a workshop, “Las noticias dan información que causa pánico” (“The news gives information that causes panic”). In fact, a few community advocates voiced their concern about the potential negative impact that the news can have on the immigrants they work with. “Sometimes I think it does more harm than good to get news from the Spanish language news services there are,” said Lourdes

Martinez of Mujeres Unidas y Activas. She explained that news stories usually focus on immigrants as victims, while “the more important piece of the story is missing, such as who is resisting, and how to take action.” When her own organization gets calls from reporters interested in individuals to feature in their stories, they are generally looking for women who feel threatened by policies, rather than those fighting for policy change.

SPANISH-LANGUAGE RADIO

Radio ranked second among respondents as a source of local news and information, with just over half the number as television. Several Spanish-language radio stations are broadcast in Oakland. All of them are commercial, and among them, little broadcast time is dedicated to local news, with a few notable exceptions.

Univision Radio

[98.9 Que Buena](#) is a commercial music station owned by Univision, and [93.3 La Raza](#) is commercial music station owned by Spanish Broadcasting System. The programming on both stations is primarily music and entertainment, with minimal public affairs information shared incidentally on talk shows.

KIQI 1010AM

[KIQI 1010AM](#) is a San Francisco-based, Spanish-language, talk radio station. Scheduling is comprised of independent talk programs, a few public affairs shows, infomercials, and programs hosted by local businesses. Each independent programmer pays the station for airtime.

KIQI airs “[Hecho en California](#)” (“Made in California”), a fast-paced program hosted by Marcos Gutierrez for a total of four

and a half hours daily on weekdays. It is a mix of talk radio, messages from local sponsors, music, and listener calls. The host discusses information relevant to immigrants, such as policy debates and immigrant rights, and takes calls from listeners to discuss such topics. He often includes lawyers to address listeners' legal questions, and talks to reporters or others calling in from protests or other events.

[“Información Es Poder”](#) (“Information Is Power”) is a weekly one-hour public affairs call-in show broadcast on KIQI 1010, on the internet, and through Facebook Live. As its name suggests, the focus is on providing relevant information to the immigrant community. Its host, Michelle White, is a radio veteran who formerly worked on “Hecho en California.” She hosts extended conversations with guests from non-profit advocacy and service organizations. The show receives calls from all over the Bay Area, and puts listeners directly in touch with experts.

[“Linea Abierta”](#) (“The Line is Open”) is a daily one-hour news program produced by the non-profit Spanish-language public radio network, [Radio Bilingüe](#). It is hosted by veteran reporters Samuel Orozco, Chelis Lopez, and Martha Elena Ramirez, and includes reported pieces, analysis of news and policy, interviews with newsmakers, and listener calls. As a nationally-broadcast program, it does not include local Bay Area news, but rather covers topics relevant to Latino immigrants across the country. It airs on KIQI 1010 on Thursday and Saturday afternoons. Across much of California, Radio Bilingüe has dedicated frequencies which broadcast Radio Bilingüe news as well as local programming. However, the organization has not been able to acquire its own station in the Bay Area.

It is worth noting that in contrast to television, which provides clearer visual clues when broadcasting commercials, the lines between advertisers and “guests” on commercial radio can be difficult to discern. The pay-to-play station, KIQI 1010AM, for instance, has entire segments of infomercials produced in a way that sound like talk radio, with a “host” speaking to what sounds like a “guest” marketing a product. Public affairs programs sometimes include expert guests who also advertise their services on air. This practice, while by no means unique to Spanish-language radio, makes it difficult for listeners to discern between independently verified information and advertisements. This presents an ideal opportunity for fraudulent businesses, who can easily pay their way onto the airwaves to gain the trust of loyal listeners. As Ian Philabaum of the Immigration Law Lab told *El Tímpano*, “Radio has been an access point for predators.”

SPANISH-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS

The Bay Area was once home to a rich landscape of Spanish-language publications. Many were published by local mainstream outlets. Others were supported by New America Media, the nation's foremost advocate for ethnic media. But in the past 15 years, several Spanish-language publications have struggled, even while the local Latino immigrant community continues to grow. *Nuevo Mundo*, a free weekly published by the *San Jose Mercury News*, [closed in 2005](#) after a nine-year run. *El Mensajero*, a San Francisco weekly founded in 1987, was purchased in 2004 by the transnational publishing group ImpreMedia, which gradually cut staff before [closing the paper's Bay Area bureau in 2014](#). More recently, San Francisco-based New America Media closed down in late 2017, citing funding and management challenges.

What remains of the Spanish-language press in Oakland is a handful of free newspapers distributed in Fruitvale, with varying publication schedules, editorial standards, and priorities:

El Tecolote is a bilingual, biweekly community newspaper published by Acción Latina, a non-profit cultural and civic engagement organization based in San Francisco’s Mission District. The newspaper, founded as a project of a La Raza Studies course at San Francisco State University in 1970, is the longest-running Spanish-language newspaper in California. It publishes original articles on news and culture, as well as contributions from community members and a community calendar. It has provided a platform for many local emerging Latino writers. Much of the publication’s reporting concerns San Francisco and the Mission District, and while *El Tecolote* has a strong and loyal following in San Francisco, it is less recognized among Oakland’s Latino immigrants.

Visión Hispana is a bilingual, biweekly newspaper distributed in the East Bay. It focuses on positive stories, such as a regular feature on youth athletes, profiles of businesses, and syndicated articles on healthy living. It is supported by advertisements from local businesses and classifieds.

El Mundo is a bilingual publication put out by Oakland’s African American newspaper, the *Oakland Post*. Many of its stories are translations of *Post* articles, which focus on East Bay politics. The *Post*’s publisher is politically connected, and the paper does not shy away from editorial content reflecting his opinions about local political issues and officials.

El Reportero is a bilingual newspaper mostly comprised of brief reports from across Latin America, as well as syndicated articles on topics such as nutrition and mysticism. Aside from a short list of cultural events in the Bay Area, there is little content specific to the region.

For the most part, these papers are not widely or consistently distributed in Oakland and lack loyal readership. In workshops and surveys, rarely did residents mention newspapers as a regular source for news and information. When they did, they were hard-pressed to recall the name of the paper they had read. Others were surprised to learn of the existence of Spanish-language newspapers in Oakland.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION SOURCES

Traditional news media is only one way information, news, and narratives are shared. In this section we'll review the local information landscape beyond news outlets, including social networks and community institutions.

For many community members we spoke with, grassroots organizations play an important role as a source of information, connection, and engagement on issues they care about. This was particularly true in our workshops, where participants—by nature of being there—were actively involved in such groups. In these workshops, we asked participants to indicate how often they relied on particular sources for news and information. Community organizations were named most frequently, followed by churches, friends, relatives, and television.

CHURCHES & INTERFAITH ORGANIZATIONS

On a Thursday evening in April, Emma Paulino of Oakland Community Organizations (OCO)—an interfaith grassroots organizing group—led seven Latino immigrant residents in conversation in the basement of a Catholic church in Fruitvale. She began the meeting with introductions and a prayer, and then asked those gathered around the circle what issues were on their minds. This evening, the cost of living dominated the conversation. One person had heard about new regulations on constructing in-law units in homes and backyards, but wasn't quite sure what it meant for her. After some

discussion, Emma said she would look into it and try to get an answer from the city.

The following week, back at the church, this issue of in-law units was the main item on the agenda, and the local City Councilman, Noel Gallo, was there, armed with a thick stack of papers outlining the new construction regulations. In the course of an hour, he attempted to explain what the changes meant, and discussed city resources people could access if they were interested in building additions to their property. Residents, for their part, voiced their challenges in dealing with the city's rising rent. Before the end of the meeting, Emma told the group about the city's search for a new school superintendent, and closed with a prayer wishing the city strength and wisdom in selecting a leader for the role.

Meetings like these, organized and facilitated by OCO, are held each month in a handful of churches across East Oakland. Many are in Spanish, and some in Spanish and English. They are a combination of information session, group discussion, and prayer circle, and are aimed at empowering residents to engage in local civic affairs. Over the course of a half a dozen meetings we attended, we witnessed city council members explain policies and listen to residents' concerns, heads of municipal agencies outline plans for road improvements and explain the budget process, and a police commander answer questions about how his agency was addressing neighborhood crime.

In addition to providing the space for this type of grassroots community organizing, churches also serve as information hubs connecting immigrants with a host of services. “A new immigrant Latino family in the area, their first contact will be this

church,” said Pastor Morataya of the Primer Iglesia Hispana Presbiteriana. His church provides English as a Second Language (ESL) and computer classes several times a week. The church also belongs to a regional interfaith network that supports new immigrants by finding volunteers to accompany them to legal hearings, among other endeavors. If municipal agencies, advocates, or other organizations want to reach the community, local churches are a good place to go.

In fact, many of the activities performed by faith-based organizations and leaders serving Oakland’s Latino immigrants might sound familiar to journalists and newsrooms. A few examples include:

- **Fact-checking:** As the Trump administration has pledged to crack down on undocumented immigrants, rumors of ICE raids have spread throughout immigrant communities, perpetuating fear and confusion. A church leader explained that at the start of the administration, rumors would spread through WhatsApp and text messages and eventually reach her. She would then call law enforcement to verify whether or not it was true, and disseminate the checked information back through text messages. It’s not in her job description, but as she explained, “There’s no one else who is doing this.”
- **Ensuring public accountability:** As noted in the account of OCO meetings, interfaith organizations are able to put low-income residents in direct conversation with city officials. This allows residents to ask questions, share their concerns, and pressure such officials when needed to spark the local change they want to see. OCO is a member of the national People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO)

network, and is able to mobilize a large and diverse constituency in Oakland.

- **Connecting residents to services, resources, and events:** Churches are a key point of contact for institutions seeking to reach Latino immigrants, from embassies conducting outreach to banks and municipal agencies setting up information tables after Sunday service. Mariano Contreras, a member of the Latino Task Force, explained that to spread word about a public forum with the new police chief that his group organized, he posted a notice in a church bulletin and spoke on the pulpit during mass at a local church.
- **Fostering a sense of community:** Churches provide a connection to a supportive community—something that can be difficult to find and extremely valuable for new immigrants. Many Mam immigrants for example, speak little Spanish or English, and church services provide an opportunity to connect with others who speak their language.

LIBRARIES

On five separate occasions, El Tímpano surveyed residents in the lobby of the César Chávez Branch of the Oakland Public Library, located in Fruitvale Plaza. In that time, we were able to see how the library serves as a community hub, especially for the neighborhood’s immigrant population. It was clear that branch manager Pete Villaseñor’s ongoing efforts to make the library inviting to all residents plays a big role in this. The library is decorated with festive Mexican art, has multilingual staff and signage, and a large Spanish-language collection. A former Mam staff member produced a Mam-language outreach video they posted to the library’s Facebook page, which Pete attributes to bringing in more

local Mam residents. A few noteworthy ways the library serves as a source for local information:

- The first-floor lobby includes two large bulletin boards as well as informational displays. Many patrons spend upwards of five minutes reviewing the boards, which contain information on upcoming events, social services such as where to find the Alameda County food bank and how to register for Medi-Cal insurance, and information from local non-profit organizations.
- The library has a dynamic roster of programming catering to the largely Latino immigrant community it serves. This includes not only literary programming but also Spanish-English conversation groups, children’s movies, a monthly “Lawyer in the Library” session, a knitting circle, and visits from social service agency representatives. During the course of two months tabling in the lobby, we saw many repeat visitors.

The César Chávez branch is one of several libraries that serve Oakland’s Latino immigrants, though its collection and programming perhaps caters to the Latino



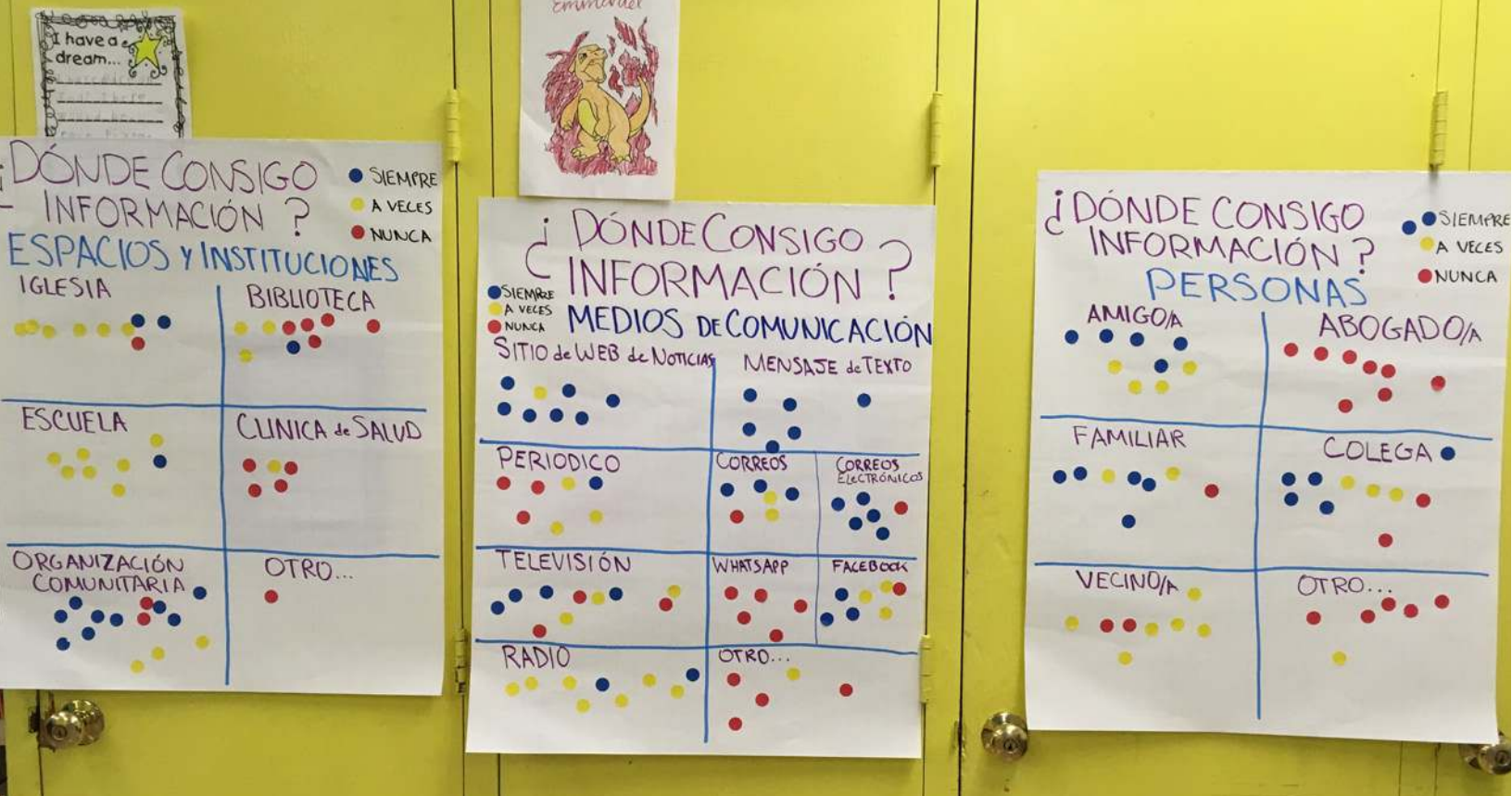
The bulletin board at the César Chávez branch library is a space for information on local resources and events.

immigrant community more than any other, attracting visitors from across Oakland and the East Bay.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT GROUPS & OTHER COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

Many local grassroots and advocacy organizations based in the Fruitvale neighborhood serve as sources of information and empowerment for the Latino immigrant community. They include, but are not limited to:

- **Centro Legal de la Raza:** Founded nearly 50 years ago, Centro Legal is a high-profile non-profit organization that provides legal services for low-income, immigrant, and Latino communities. It holds monthly clinics, and often partners with other organizations for public “know your rights” workshops.
- **Clínica de la Raza:** One of the largest community health centers in California, La Clínica runs numerous physical and mental health clinics serving Latino immigrants.
- **Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA):** MUA is a Latina immigrant women’s empowerment organization that holds member meetings twice a week. As part of its “MUA University” it also provides presentations on and discussions about political issues that impact the community. When we visited, the day’s presentation explained the implications of California’s new “Sanctuary State” law.
- **Street Level Health Project:** This community health clinic caters to day laborers and their families. The organization has holistic health services, provides free lunches, and holds regular member meetings. It also gave birth to the Oakland Workers Collective,



Participants in group workshops expressed that community organizations were among the most relied upon sources for information on issues they care about.

an advocacy, education, and civic engagement organization for day laborers.

- **Unity Council:** An economic development organization with a large footprint in Fruitvale, the Unity Council manages affordable housing, a senior center, and Head Start programs; runs the Fruitvale Plaza farmers market; organizes annual street festivals; and provides resources to support economic opportunity, including a career center and a mentorship program for Latino young men.
- **Schools:** Public, charter, and Catholic schools also serve as community information hubs. Many schools have parent groups that aim to engage and inform parents not only about education, but also about other issues such as nutrition and immigration rights. Schools, like churches, also provide space for community groups to host events.

- **Others:** It is impossible to name all of the institutions that serve Oakland's Latino immigrants, but some additional groups include Causa Justa, Oakland Catholic Worker, the Restaurant Opportunity Center, Spanish-Speaking Citizens' Foundation, and the International Rescue Committee.

CHALLENGES OF GRASSROOTS INFORMATION SOURCES

Given the centrality of trusted institutions in Oakland's Latino immigrant community, some have become gatekeepers for disseminating information. Yet for many of these institutions, that is a role thrust upon them by necessity rather than design, and the reliance on overworked community organizers to provide information can create a bottleneck. As an example, when we asked the organizers of a citywide town hall—a gathering with a notable absence

of monolingual Spanish speakers—how they tried to reach Latino immigrants, they admitted they had a hard time. They explained that they had emailed a grassroots organization with strong ties to the community, but never heard back.

Most of the community organizations we encountered struggle with insufficient resources and, during a time of changing immigration enforcement policies, constant crises to address. Disseminating information in a timely and reliable basis is often beyond their capacity.

Realistically, the number of people these organizations do reach through meetings, emails, phone calls, social media, and word of mouth comprises only a small fraction of Oakland's Latino immigrant population. The vast majority of residents are not engaged enough to attend meetings or be active in a community organization. As one community leader explained, “Time is a challenge in reaching community.” People are simply busy. Pastor Morataya described his concern about community meetings: “A esas reuniones, asisten líderes, pero no estoy seguro que asiste la comunidad” (“At these meetings, there are leaders, but I'm not sure the community is there”). This dynamic played out at a forum organized by a Latino civic engagement organization. Present at the meeting were a Spanish-language television network, the Oakland mayor, a city council member, a Mexican consulate representative, and several leaders of community organizations. Simultaneous translation was available. Yet while debriefing afterwards, organizers expressed their disappointment that there weren't as many Spanish speakers as they had hoped to see.

While regular gatherings such as OCO's monthly meetings at individual churches attract a consistent group of participants, and often include guests such as city council members, municipal staffers, or police captains, it is unclear how far the information shared in those meetings goes. Attendees can number from as low as five to as many as 20.

What this means is that community groups often struggle to get information and resources to Latino immigrants. One organizer told us that in the restaurant where she works, she has become a source of information for her fellow immigrant colleagues. When she told them that an alliance of organizations had set up a rapid-response hotline to report ICE activity, her colleagues were surprised and elated to learn about it. Even though the hotline had been running for nearly a year and had been publicized in the news, at numerous community meetings, and in emails and fliers, this was the first time they learned of it. They simply had not been in contact with any of the various organizations promoting the initiative.

One church leader told us she worries about this often. Outside of a few institutions, there are no centralized places for immigrants to receive information and share their stories. What about all of the community members who aren't connected to institutions—those who don't go to church, aren't active in their children's schools, or don't have the time, child care, transit fare, or initiative to attend community meetings? How do they access the information that is circulated in those spaces?

PRODUCTION & MOVEMENT

Production and movement looks at the variety of information and the diversity of content within an information ecosystem, whether from the government, community news sources, social media, word of mouth, and other local information producers.

TOOLS, FORMATS & APPROACHES FOR SHARING INFORMATION

The following tools, methods, and approaches are used by community organizations, schools, and other local institutions to reach Oakland’s Latino immigrants.

In-person meetings & outreach

When asked about the most effective way his organization reaches community members, the director of a health clinic said without hesitation, “face-to-face.” For grassroots organizations, regular in-person meetings are key to imparting information and listening to members’ concerns. The organizations OCO, MUA, Street Level Health Project, and Restaurant Opportunity Center all have regular meetings, as do school parent groups, legal aid organizations, and mental health groups. Street Level Health Project also conducts outreach by going to the streets early in the morning to speak with day laborers. The challenges of face-to-face engagement are that it is resource intensive, only reaches a limited number of people, and can be ineffective in imparting timely information.

Text messages & phone calls

In order to get people to meetings, organizers told us that personal phone calls and text messages are the most effective

outreach mechanisms. “It seems like the population we serve are very into their phones, texting, doing things through their phones,” observed an attorney with Centro Legal de la Raza. The Immigrant Family Defense Fund, which works with immigrant parents of public school children, uses a text-messaging platform to reach a large number of people. For OCO meetings at individual churches, members take responsibility for calling others to remind them to attend.

Fliers

Many organizations use fliers, though their effectiveness is debatable even among those that do. “Fliers fly,” said the OCO organizer, Emma Paulino. But, she added, people often want something physical they can take with them. The bulletin board at the César Chávez Branch Library, covered in fliers from various organizations and agencies, is clearly well utilized, as many people stop and survey the information posted there.

Traditional news media

Spanish-language television news appears to be the only platform equipped for getting information out in a timely way to a large number of Latino immigrants. A lawyer with Centro Legal de la Raza said her organization has a good relationship with the local stations, and when they hold a press conference or need to get information to the community, they can be relied upon to be there.

Social media

Just over a quarter of survey respondents named Facebook as a source of news and information. However, in workshops, a more nuanced relationship with Facebook emerged, with several people saying that they don’t know whether to trust a piece of information they see on the platform. “Lo

veo en Facebook pero no se si es verdad,” (“I see it on Facebook, but I don’t know whether it’s true”) said one participant. Among the Mam community, one local leader said that “if there’s a death in the community, people will post on Facebook to raise funds or do something.” However, there are no particular Facebook pages or groups we found dedicated to providing local news and information to Oakland’s Mam- or Spanish-speaking communities.

ACCESS

This dimension focuses on the political, cultural, time, cost, and other factors that affect the flow of information. In particular, it seeks to identify any barriers to inclusive interaction and participation within an information ecosystem

BARRIERS TO INFORMATION

Communication platforms

A number of communication platforms used frequently by politicians, government agencies, and journalists, such as NextDoor, Twitter, and email, are not so commonly used among the residents we spoke with. What this means is that information shared through those channels may never reach many of Oakland’s Latino immigrants.

These differing media habits present a significant barrier for Latino and indigenous immigrants in accessing information. For instance, during the North Bay wildfires in the fall of 2017, municipal officials used Twitter and NextDoor, as well as traditional media outlets, to update Bay Area residents about air quality and how to protect oneself from breathing toxic particles. Even in non-emergency situations, city council members

use email newsletters and Twitter to update their constituents, and community organizations use email newsletters to promote their events. The lack of a central, dedicated space and platform to share timely information with Oakland’s Latino immigrants begs the question of how municipal officials would reach the community in the event of a crisis.

Language

For Oakland’s monolingual Spanish- and Mam-speaking immigrants, language is the greatest barrier to information and civic engagement. The inability to read or understand English severely limits the information available to them and opportunities to share their stories, opinions, and concerns.

Lourdes Martinez, the advocacy director of MUA, sounded exasperated when she described how much information the women she works with miss when it is not translated into Spanish. “Our community,” she said, referring to the immigrant women her organization serves, “is monolingual. It is not bilingual. Because I speak English, I have access to news that someone else who doesn’t speak English doesn’t have access to.” Because MUA’s staff includes monolingual Spanish speakers, she sometimes translates news articles—such as those analyzing policy proposals—into Spanish so that her colleagues can understand the issue in the sort of complexity that is rarely found on television news. When she does, she said, she wishes she could get the translation out to more immigrants who would find it valuable, but she simply doesn’t have the time. News articles, updates, actions, and invitations to events are all examples she gave of information that is often only produced in English, despite its relevance to Latino immigrants. We heard similar frustration

from Emma Paulino of OCO. When city officials share information to pass on to her organization’s members, they often share that information in English only, leaving her to either respond asking for a Spanish translation, or to translate the material herself.

The Mam community is even more linguistically isolated than monolingual Spanish speakers. As one Mam resident said, “Most of the community doesn’t speak Spanish. The language barrier is a really big one.” Many Mam adults do not speak Spanish fluently, and have low literacy levels. According to Mam residents we spoke with, there is no source of local news or information in Mam.

Certain community institutions are particularly adept at bridging language barriers for Spanish speakers. In churches affiliated with OCO, meetings take place in Spanish or in both Spanish and English, depending on the needs of participants. Centro Legal de la Raza and Clínica de la Raza are well known among the Latino immigrant community. Both conduct substantial programming in Spanish and have Spanish speaking employees. However, accounts from case workers at Clínica de la Raza suggest that the organization is struggling to meet the growing demand for Mam speakers.

Nate Dunstan from the English Language Learner Office of the Oakland Public School District explained that most schools with a large Latino immigrant population have staff that can communicate with parents in Spanish, and the district has Mam interpreters and outreach coordinators to help communicate with that community. A few schools that target immigrant students have regular meetings with parents in their native languages. And in many cases,

children play the role of translators for their immigrant parents. We saw this firsthand while conducting surveys, when Mam parents relied on their children to translate the questions into Mam. The César Chávez Branch Library, in an effort to reach the neighborhood’s Mam community, produced a Mam-language video explaining the services available at the library. According to Henry Sales, the Mam librarian who was behind the effort, it is so rare to see any information produced specifically for the Mam community that the video succeeded in attracting Mam residents by demonstrating that they were welcome and that there was someone there who spoke their language.

Oakland was the first city in the nation to pass an Equal Access to Services ordinance, ensuring that limited-English residents have access to municipal services and resources through the translation of certain documents, the hiring of bilingual staff, and other efforts. The ordinance targets languages spoken by more than 10,000 residents with limited English speaking ability. Only Spanish and Chinese currently meet that threshold. The city recently revamped its website to make it more service-oriented, and Mai-Ling Garcia, the digital engagement manager overseeing that process, explained that one goal was to simplify the language so that the site is not only more accessible in English but also easier to translate into other languages.

Literacy & education

Education can be another significant barrier to information access for many Latino immigrants. According to the census, 35-45% of East Oakland residents did not graduate from high school. Among Latino immigrants, the rate is likely much higher. In a 2016 survey of Oakland day laborers

conducted by Stanford in partnership with Street Level Health Project, 92% of those surveyed did not graduate high school, and 69% had less than six years of education. In two of our workshops, a participant needed assistance during a text-based activity, and while conducting our surveys we helped out a handful of participants who couldn't read. The Mam community in particular has high rates of illiteracy, as many families come from the countryside where, as Henry Sales explained, many children work rather than attend school.

While organizations that work closely with low-literacy immigrant communities design strategies to overcome this challenge—such as conveying information in visuals and in person rather than relying on text—mainstream news and information sources that rely exclusively on text exclude these residents.

As a few community leaders pointed out, low literacy is not the only educational barrier to understanding the news. “The news isn't designed for people who aren't already in the know,” stated Lourdes Martinez of MUA. She said she wished the news were presented in an educational way that puts issues in context “to explain how a national issue affects local communities.” When she gives presentations to MUA members, she uses graphics to present basic civics lessons such as how the government is structured, an approach she says MUA members find helpful in grasping the information. “Making an effort to simplify the language could go a long way,” Lourdes said.

Fear & trust

It is impossible to talk about barriers to information for Latino immigrants without raising the issue of trust. At a time of anti-immigrant rhetoric and increased attention

on enforcement, many residents do not feel safe in unfamiliar spaces or institutions and are hesitant to take part in public events and activities.

At the start of the current presidential administration, many direct-service organizations serving Latino immigrants reported that their clients or members were not showing up to appointments or events out of fear that by participating in activities targeting immigrants, they might attract attention from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This presents an even greater challenge for immigrant advocacy organizations. At a time when it is particularly important to disseminate information about policy reforms and immigrant rights to those targeted by the administration, some of the most effective ways of sharing such information—in-person meetings and events—are perceived by immigrants as a potential threat.

This climate of fear has made immigrants even more reliant on people and organizations they trust. “They want to go to spaces they know, where they don't feel threatened,” said the leader of a community health clinic. Some public meetings, including many of the city's Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPs), take place at police stations, where immigrants who fear getting swept up by law enforcement are unlikely to feel comfortable. On the other hand, a room full of Latino immigrants showed up to speak with a police captain when he met with them at an OCO meeting at a Catholic school.

Time and again, community leaders and residents mentioned “word of mouth” as one of the most effective ways for information to spread. “People come here because they know people who come here,” said a lawyer at Centro Legal de

la Raza. The strong ties people have to their churches, schools, family, and other social circles are influential channels for information exchange.

Yet the importance of word of mouth can be a double-edged sword. Social networks can help information spread quickly, meaning they can also facilitate the spread of rumors and misinformation. One persistent rumor, particularly at the start of the Trump administration, was about ICE raids—a rumor that sparks fear and concern throughout the community. As Nate Dunstan of the public school district explained, it can be hard to dispel misinformation once it takes hold:

There’s definitely still a lot of misinformation through rumor and word of mouth that we hear, about raids happening that didn’t. There’s a lot of misinformation around... what consequences could come from accessing public benefits to your documentation status. We have literature we can provide in writing, but people still don’t believe us because they’ve heard otherwise.

Taking into consideration the importance of social ties in instilling a sense of trust, the school district has hired “community navigators”—local residents whose job is to connect families with needed resources. As Nate explained, parents are “more likely to trust what they’ve heard when it comes from someone from their community.”

This sentiment was shared by Pastor Morataya of the Primera Iglesia Hispana Presbiteriana, who described a widespread perception that the city lacks resources for the undocumented community. He explained that many immigrants neglect medical care or self-diagnose illnesses because of the false belief that their immigration status will be exposed if they seek medical care.

IMPACT OF INFORMATION

This dimension looks at the relationship between information, knowledge, and large-scale behavior change, such as collective community action and policy change. Broadly, it examines how information affects individual and community opportunity, well-being, and development.

Our research revealed a media landscape that leaves much to be desired when it comes to providing information that empowers Oakland’s Latino immigrant residents, shines a light on their stories, or provides a channel for their voices to be heard. While a strong network of community organizations makes up for many of these gaps, there is great potential for a more robust and empowering local media to serve this community.

NEGATIVE NEWS CONTRIBUTES TO DISENGAGEMENT

In each workshop we held, and in numerous surveys, participants raised the issue of negativity in the news. Several people told us that the news has become so negative, they no longer watch it. The overall sense we got from residents and community leaders is that in many ways, commercial television news contributes to fear and disempowerment among its Latino immigrant viewers.

LACK OF INFORMATION PERPETUATES FEAR & VULNERABILITY TO ABUSE

In speaking with residents, it was striking how many people expressed the simple need for more information. When it comes to issues important to them, they often don't know where to turn to inform themselves. Those issues range widely—from emergency preparedness to youth summer programs, affordable housing, and workers' rights.

At a time when Latino immigrants are impacted by harsh national policy proposals as well as local issues such as the Bay Area's housing crisis, the lack of reliable sources for news and information leaves immigrant residents unable to make informed decisions for their health, safety, and wellbeing. Pastor Morataya pointed to the increase in Oakland's minimum wage as one example of a topic many Latino immigrants are uninformed about. “Mucha gente va a restaurantes y ni saben del salario mínimo” (“Many people go to work in restaurants and don't even know about the minimum wage”). Such lack of information can leave residents vulnerable to abuse. As one resident put it, “Mucha de la comunidad no está informada. Por eso pasan abusos” (“Much of the community is not informed. That's why abuses occur”).

CIVIC CONVERSATIONS FREQUENTLY LACK LATINO IMMIGRANT VOICES

In our surveys and conversations, we found residents who were very involved in their communities, and who wanted to be better informed and heard. Yet their voices are often absent or underrepresented in larger civic conversations—the result of numerous barriers to information access and linguistic and cultural divides in the information ecosystem.

In effect, we often found parallel conversations taking place—one in Spanish and one in English—missing the opportunity to find common ground, share resources, and build coalitions. This was apparent immediately following a massive Mexico City earthquake, when we heard participants at an OCO workshop discuss the need for information on how to prepare for an emergency. Meanwhile, in an NCPC meeting that took place a half a mile away, participants—six white and one black—shared information about free emergency preparedness workshops. Both meetings also discussed the concern residents have over illegal dumping. As these meetings are often comprised of social networks, whether through church groups or neighborhood friends, they appear to split along the social and cultural divides of those social networks.

The insular nature of many of these meetings means that the stories and perspectives of Latino immigrants are not exposed to and understood by other communities. As one faith leader said, OCO does a good job of telling the stories of Latino immigrants, “but to ourselves. What OCO hasn't been able to do is amplify those voices, get them to others.” This point was reiterated by an active

OCO member. He said Latino immigrant residents like himself are all too familiar with the problems they are dealing with. A major gap, as he sees it, is getting those stories out beyond their own community: “Lo que queremos es difundir las noticias para que salgan afuera de nuestra comunidad” (“What we want is to spread the news so that it gets out beyond our community”).

The lack of a clear way for Latino immigrants to share their stories so that they reach a larger or influential audience is a source of frustration on an individual and systemic level. Jevon Cochran, a community organizer with Causa Justa, said that “in political campaigns, the people directly affected by issues are not adequately represented.” Take as an example the issue of the housing crisis. Since the Ghostship Fire—a tragedy that took the lives of dozens of artists in a hazardous live-work building in Fruitvale—local media has extensively covered the challenges facing artists as a result of the region’s high cost of living. Yet Latino immigrants make up the region’s lowest-paid workforce, making them one of the most vulnerable populations when it comes to housing security. We heard numerous stories from hospital workers and legal advocates about how the housing crisis affects this community, including extreme overcrowding, women living with abusive partners, and landlords shutting off utilities in an attempt to evict tenants. Relative to artists, however, these stories have received scant attention by the local press and political leadership.

INSIGHTS & SUGGESTIONS

There are many great ways that existing organizations are attempting to facilitate information channels to and from Oakland’s Latino immigrant communities. We’re interested in collaborating with the community members and organizations we met while conducting this research to strengthen those efforts and develop new ways to address some of the information gaps that have been illuminated. Here are a few approaches to community journalism that might inspire the development of new ideas in Oakland:

- **Facebook news channel:** One woman who filled out our survey said she wished Oakland had a local Facebook page like the one [she follows in Colima, Mexico](#), where she lived half her life. The page shares independently reported news and information about the city, and links to articles published on [www.colimanoticias.com](#). She told us the Colima Noticias Facebook page has helped foster a better sense of community and understanding among residents about local affairs, and helps keep her engaged in the city even when she is away. There are other examples of Facebook-native news sites that help connect residents to local news and information, such as [Jersey Shore Hurricane News](#), which began as a Facebook-only news site and now has its own [website](#). What makes these sites reliable sources of news is that they do not simply provide a platform for information, but they are administered by trained moderators or professional journalists who verify information that is posted, thus avoiding the spread of rumors and the sense of incredulity that many people have when consuming information on Facebook.

- Listening Post - A community microphone:** The [Listening Post](#), first developed in New Orleans by Internews, places microphones in public places to gather stories from residents, especially those from communities traditionally underrepresented in the local media. The microphones are placed in different locations where the community gathers—such as barber shops, parks, and community centers—and residents are invited to share personal stories on issues in the news. The initiative also uses a text-messaging platform to do the same. By partnering with a local public radio station to host a monthly show, the Listening Post amplifies voices from diverse communities. This approach has now been replicated by several local news outlets to foster civic engagement and amplify underrepresented voices. *(Full disclosure: This information needs assessment is supported by a grant from the [Listening Post Collective](#).)*
- Mobile-based reporting and information:** Another survey respondent told us she wished she could get news by text so she can get it anywhere at any time, and not miss out when she is busy during the news broadcast. While many national news outlets have developed their own mobile news apps, very few residents we spoke with mentioned these apps as a source of news. Rather than requiring residents to download a specific mobile app, it may be more effective to leverage tools and platforms they already use to disseminate information by mobile phone, such as text messaging or WhatsApp. One model can be found in the Zimbabwean news outlet [263Chat](#), which distributes its newspaper in [PDF form on WhatsApp](#) to subscribers. Its objective is to reach audiences who have limited online access and thus wouldn't find articles on their website or Twitter. Considering the widespread desire for information on basic resources, a mobile-based news bulletin that includes a directory of resources and events may be a valuable information service for this community. Another mobile-based news platform is [GroundSource](#), which facilitates reporting and conversations with a large community via text messaging. The platform is used by the Listening Post project in New Orleans and other communities to gather stories from residents on timely issues.
- Community navigators and partnerships:** Recognizing the importance of trusting relationships, the Oakland Unified School District hired community navigators to help connect families with resources and information. News organizations and others seeking to develop information channels to serve this community would do well to borrow this approach by hiring from the community and partnering with known and trusted institutions—many of which already inform and engage the Latino immigrant community. As Pastor Morataya told us, so many community institutions already have strong bonds with the community, it only makes sense that they help disseminate reliable information. “Creo que las iglesias, escuelas, tiendas, deben informar mejor acerca de actualidades migratorias, salarios minimos, etcétera.” (“I believe the churches, schools, shops should better inform people about what is going on in immigration reform, minimum wages, etc.”)
- Community bulletin board:** [DailyTalk](#) in [Monrovia, Liberia](#), is a simple and effective news initiative that relies on a physical presence to inform residents

every day. A large billboard sits at a central traffic circle in Monrovia and shares daily headlines relevant to the lives of community members. During the 2015 cholera epidemic, Daily Talk was a reliable source of crisis-response information. In Oakland, the César Chávez Library’s bulletin board is heavily trafficked as a resource for many immigrants and others searching for community resources. If they do not already, community organizations, civic agencies, and news outlets would do well to leverage the visibility of this and other community bulletin boards to share timely and relevant information to the Latino immigrant community (such as public health and safety alerts, and invitations to public events).

- **Cycle News:** In the Corona neighborhood of Queens, New York, a women’s empowerment group partnered with the New York City Department of Immigrant Affairs to [create a two-way information service](#) that provides immigrant residents with resources about city services, and the city with information about immigrants’ concerns. The women’s group, Mujeres en Movimiento, took off on bikes throughout the neighborhood, meeting people face-to-face to share information and collect their feedback, which they then forwarded to city staff.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Under the auspices of “El Tímpano,” and with the ongoing support of the Listening Post Collective, we commit to sharing and discussing these findings with stakeholders, including the residents who filled out our surveys and the community leaders who shared their insights, as well as municipal staffers and others who can use these findings to strengthen their engagement with Oakland’s Latino immigrant communities.

For our part, El Tímpano aims to collaborate with local organizations and funders to facilitate two-way channels of news and information that inform and engage Oakland’s Latino immigrants, based on what we have learned from the community throughout this information needs assessment. Prior to the release of this report, El Tímpano received a grant from California Humanities to launch a community conversation in the model of the Listening Post, focusing on the issue of housing. Over the course of one month, [more than 100 people stepped up to our community microphone](#) to share their personal story about how they are affected by the rising cost of rent. El Tímpano is collaborating with various local media outlets to amplify and investigate these stories in both English and Spanish.

While that is our first step to exploring solutions to address the information gaps raised in this report, it is only one potential solution. El Tímpano has also received [a grant from the Lenfest Institute](#) to deploy the mobile reporting service, GroundSource, to facilitate conversations

with Latino immigrants to engage and inform them on local issues, and support from the [RJI Fellowship](#) to experiment with the distribution of a mobile news bulletin.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with community partners to support their work and to explore new ways to inform, engage, and empower Oakland’s Latino immigrant community. If you are interested in collaborating, do not hesitate to reach out via www.eltimpano.org to start a discussion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report and the research that went into it could not have been possible without the support of a team of advisors, the collaboration of community organizations, and the willingness of dozens of Oakland residents and organizers to share their time and expertise.

The Listening Post’s Jesse Hardman and Carolyn Powers provided mentorship and guidance throughout the process in implementing and adapting the Listening Post Playbook to meet local needs. Diana Montaña assisted in designing and facilitating group workshops, and provided copyediting for this report. Mario Corea and Henry Sales assisted in the survey and outreach process. Jose Luis Caicedo provided translation support and Paul Caicedo designed the graphics used in the survey process. Cristina Kim volunteered her ideas to assist with the survey and group workshops.

We are grateful to the friends and mentors who contributed their wealth of experience in community media from the start of this process. El Tímpano’s circle of advisors includes Josue Rojas, artist and ED of Acción Latina, Samuel Orozco, News Director of Radio Bilingüe, and Daniela Gerson, journalist, educator, and co-founder of Alhambra Source.

Before launching the survey process, we reached out to several community leaders and connectors, as well as mediamakers and municipal leaders and staffers to listen to their insight on local media and how it is addressing the needs of the Latino immigrant community they are a part of or work with. We are indebted to all of the individuals who shared their time and insight:

Lourdes Martinez & Malena Mayorga of Mujeres Unidas y Activas

Trevor Houser of the Immigrant Family Defense Fund

Emma Paulino & Alba Hernandez of Oakland Community Organizations

Jae Maldonado, former ED of Street Level Health Project

Pedro Pablo Morataya, Pastor of Primera Iglesia Hispana Presbiteriana

Jackie Gonzalez, former Immigration Policy Director at Centro Legal de la Raza

Mariano Contreras of the Latino Task Force

Cristina Hernandez of the Diocese of Oakland

Chris Iglesias of the Unity Council

Nate Dunstan of the Refugee & Asylee Program at Oakland Unified School District

Pete Villaseñor, César Chavez Branch Manager at the Oakland Public Library

Emily Weak of the Oakland Public Library

Terrence Cole of Casa Ubuntu

Jevon Cochran of Causa Justa

Sandy Close & Elena Shore of New America Media

Kateri Simpson and Ricky Cruz of Life Academy of Health and Bioscience

Ian Philabaum of the Immigration Law Lab

Elizabeth Torres, formerly of Fremont High School

Mai-Ling Garcia, Online Engagement Manager of the City of Oakland

Abel Guillén, City Councilman, City of Oakland

Henry Sales, Mam community leader

Holly Alonso of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park

Hisham Zawil of the International Rescue Committee of Oakland

Nicole Marquez of Worksafe

Fernando Estrada of Local #304

Michelle White & Miguel Perez of Información es Poder

Elena Miramar of Visión Hispana

Maria Moreno of Restaurant Opportunities Center

Tessa Cruz of iSeed

The honest, informed opinions from these individuals and their support for digging into this topic fueled our motivation to expand this research. Along with these individuals, we are grateful for the community organizations that opened their doors to invite us to survey their community members or to facilitate workshops in their spaces: Oakland Community Organizations, Mujeres Unidas y Activas, the Fremont High School Parent Resource Center, the César Chávez Branch of the Oakland Public Library, Unity Council, Primera Iglesia Hispana Presbiteriana, and Iglesia de Dios.

Finally, we are grateful for the hundreds of Oakland residents who collaborated in this process by participating in our workshops, filling out surveys, sharing questions, ideas, and encouragement along the way, and demonstrating the civic engagement that we hope to support through this report and our work to come. We are inspired and motivated by you, and hope to continue to collaborate as we move forward.

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Press Enquiries
press@internews.org

EL TÍMPANO

E-mail: hola@eltimpano.org
<https://www.eltimpano.org/>



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