



Forefront



Latinx at the Forefront

Introduction

In 2019, the US Census found that 18.3% of the population identify as Hispanic or Latino. That amounts to nearly one in five people in the United States: over 60 million people.¹ Latinx families have therefore become an integral part of the country, and the Latinx members of the Millennial and Gen-Z generations are paving the way for a more diverse, inclusive, and innovative society.

Typically identified as a population born around 1997, the Pew Research Center found that nearly half of the Gen-Z population identify as a racial or ethnic minority.² Compared to Millennials (the generation before, born between 1981 and 1996), 10% more Gen-Z people are part of a racial or ethnic minority, with a full 25% identifying as Hispanic or Latino.² An increasingly diverse new generation of students, parents, and workers is therefore starting to enter adult life in the United States, and such shifts will translate into an exciting transformation of the nation's workplace and culture. Current norms and ways of working in the world will therefore need to keep up with the fast pace of change each new generation brings.

Hispanic and Latinx populations thus make up a significant portion of this new generation, and they also bring a unique set of strengths and skills to the table that can contribute to the innovation and consequent success of organizations. Additionally, the introduction of a more diverse workforce creates a need for expanding the culture to embrace unique perspectives and support the inclusion of underrepresented groups. This means truly seeking to understand your organizational culture and the barriers you may not realize are there.

Latinx at the Forefront is here to provide a brief overview of the Gen-Z Latinx population and the knowledge we have gathered from Human Resource professionals who are actively working to make their organizations more racially and ethnically inclusive and culturally aware. It is by no means exhaustive, but we hope this overview and the resources we provide at the end of this eBook will jumpstart that journey for you.

A Note on Terminology

You may notice that various resources we quote use the terms Latino, Latina, Latinx, and Hispanic interchangeably. In our writing, we will use Latinx in order to be gender-inclusive, but we understand that not all members of the populations we discuss here identify with that term. In conversation with any Latinx person, the best practice is to simply ask which term they use.

Each of the above words are associated with the populations coming from Latin America—a group of countries in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America—in varying rates and definitions. Because this demographic is so geographically and culturally diverse, there are a number of terms that people feel comfortable with. Below is a brief description of the terms you may hear as you learn more and meet more people.

Latinx: a gender-neutral term that refers to a person who identifies (culturally or ethnically) with a country from Latin America

Latina: the female-gendered version of Latinx

Latino: the male-gendered version of Latinx

Latin@: a precursor to Latinx, this term captures the male and female genders, but it is also a bit difficult to pronounce and has become less popular.

Afro-Latinx: a person who identifies as both Black or African American and Latinx

Afro-Latina: the female-gendered version of Afro-Latinx

Afro-Latino: the male-gendered version of Afro-Latinx

Hispanic: a term that refers to a person who identifies with a country with Spanish-speaking origins, and this is the term that also captures people from Spain

Other more Geographically Specific Terms: there are many alternatives to these terms that add more nuance to how someone identifies, some of which include Boricua (Puerto Rican), Afro-Dominican (Dominican Republic), or Chicano (Mexico).

If you would like to read more, we will include more resources at the end of this eBook. The Getty Center provides a helpful primer, if you would like a bit more historical context.³

Growing up Latinx

Because this generation is still growing up, as it were, there is not much research about Latinx members of Gen-Z. However, we do have some demographic data about the families and communities that surround them. A Pew Research study about young Latinx people from Pew found that “with a median age of 28, Latinos are also the nation’s youngest major racial or ethnic group.”⁴ Another article has found that Gen-Z has slightly less immigrant backgrounds, but are much more likely to be the child of an immigrant². Even more specifically, the median age of Latinx people born in the United States is only 20, which means that more than half are members of Gen-Z.²

In a research paper for the *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* about the younger Latinx generations, Donna Maria Blancero and her colleagues conclude that “many Latinos develop biculturally with commitment and knowledge of American culture and the culture of their ethnic heritage.”⁵ This is both a source of pride and tension for Latinx members of Gen-Z, as they can feel deeply connected to both the cultures of their families’ home countries and the United States culture they grow up surrounded by.

Since the first members of Gen-Z were born during and grew up in the advent of technology’s exponential rise in access and innovation, they are more fluent in and comfortable with new forms of technology and social media than previous generations. The Pew Research Center found that 95% of the members of Gen-Z they surveyed had access to a smartphone, and the majority are online for much of the day: “44% are online ‘almost constantly,’ and an additional 44% say they’re online several times a day.”² Much of that time is spent on

social media platforms, with Youtube (85%), Instagram (72%), and Snapchat (69%).² Influencers, or celebrities who have risen to stardom through their “influence” on social media, are particularly popular with Gen-Z, and Latinx influencers are prevalent in those spaces.⁶ “Traditional” celebrities like Selena Gomez and Jennifer Lopez are joined by Vine (another social media platform) stars Lele Pons and LeJuan James. These digital platforms thus open up conversations across the globe, as the influencers mentioned earlier have roots in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, and the United States.

Like the influencers they admire, the younger Latinx generations are coming from an incredibly diverse array of backgrounds. In our own line of work, we have heard the stories of many young Latinx professionals coming from all over Latin America. Some were born outside of the United States and immigrated here at as young as three or four or as old as sixteen or seventeen. Still others were born here, either spending their entire lives in the US or moving back and forth.

Moving to the United States adds a variety of opportunities and stressors. On top of the challenges of simply growing up—making friends, finding your passions, getting along with your friends and family—Latinx children must also juggle the difficulties of learning English and their native languages, learning to navigate a new culture, and also staying connected to their old homes and distant families. We also heard a regular refrain of a pressure to succeed: to take these opportunities and make the most of them. This begins with education.

Education

One of the most significant changes between Millennial and Gen-Z Latinx populations is that the younger generation is growing up in increasingly higher-educated households, and as the older members of Gen-Z graduate high school, we are seeing exciting increases in the number of students choosing to attend college.

According to research about education in Latinx populations from 2018, 26% of Latino immigrants over the age of 25 had a bachelor's degree or more education, as opposed to a mere 10% in 1990.⁷ Following a US-wide increase in college enrollment and graduation, 11% more members of Gen-Z are likely than Millennials to have parents with a college education, meaning that more well-educated young people are entering the workforce.⁷

Having well-educated parents doesn't always correlate with a high-quality education, however. Predominantly immigrant communities tend to live in redlined communities, where schools are poorly funded and do not provide as quality of an education as many majority-white communities. Older students who immigrate to the US struggle to transfer credits from their old schools.

Consequently, while we are seeing more Latinx students graduate high school and attend college, research shows that while they “are enrolling in college in record numbers, on par with rates of white students and outpacing the rates of enrollment for black students,” we also find that Latinx populations are “uninformed or confused about the college application and/or financing process with only 44 percent of Hispanic parents aware of the Federal Pell Grant program, compared with 81 percent of white parents and 82 percent of black parents.”⁸ Paying for college is also a significant stressor for young Latinx students: 70% have unmet financial need, and 77% “reported often feeling lost when researching financial options.”⁸

“paying for college is also a significant stressor for young Latinx students”

However, when young Latinx students do find opportunities for academically rigorous coursework and support from teachers and guidance counselors, they prove their resilience and go to high-tier colleges. Finding mentors and experienced students and professionals who can guide them through the college and job application process is absolutely necessary, and programs like the Posse Foundation, Management leadership for Tomorrow, ALPFA, and Jumpstart, which build cohorts of students from under-resourced communities and provide support and resources as they apply to college and prepare to enter the workforce are making a difference.

Finally, it is also important to note that a college education is not the only path that Gen-Z students are following. Gap years, service years, and apprenticeships are becoming increasingly popular as young people begin to look outside the typical college pathway. Technical degrees in the medical, mechanical, and technological fields are also alternative options to the traditional four-year college education, with learning platforms like General Assembly providing opportunities for education outside the typical classroom or service programs like Teach for America or Americorps supporting more civil-service-based work. Still others are becoming entrepreneurs themselves. In 2018, Anna Powers wrote in an article Forbes that Gen-Z is increasingly seeking “a more malleable career path where they are not defined,” quoting a 2018 Universum Global survey finding that 56% of the 50,000 Gen-Z individuals they surveyed would consider forgoing college and immediately entering the workforce.⁹

Getting Hired

If Gen-Z Latinx students are struggling to find support in the college application process, they find even less support when they exchange their seminar rooms and lecture halls for the professional arena. The people we have worked with spoke at length about their desire for support and mentorship from experienced professionals. Latinx students with internship opportunities during college built connections they could leverage when seeking employment; however, young Latinx professionals without those networks are struggling to find jobs.

Blancero and colleagues write that “while Latinos are members of the largest and also the fastest growing group in the United States, they are disproportionately underrepresented in more highly compensated professional and leadership roles across corporate America.”⁵ Even more disappointing, they found that “well more than 50% of Hispanics experience discrimination” during the job search and interview process.⁵ They explain that this not only disadvantages Latinx job-seekers, but the organizations themselves: research has consistently shown that a more diverse workplace creates opportunity for more “creativity, flexibility, and innovation, something needed by all organizations.”⁵

This recruitment process starts in college, and Cindy Joseph, a Managing Partner at The Gee Suite, which works to transform talent and HR programs, has significant experience working in diversity and campus recruiting for companies like Goldman Sachs and Accenture. In a conversation with Josuel Plasencia (Co-Founder of Forefront), Cindy discussed the highly-competitive campus recruiting space, which has shifted from a seasonal schedule to a nearly-constant one that is targeting students earlier and earlier in their academic careers.

The central problem, though, is that those recruitment processes tend to limit the talent pool in terms of diversity. Compounded with the discrimination and implicit biases that skew the interview process, Latinx professionals just beginning to enter the workforce are unable to access those networks. Moreover, Cindy Joseph argues that limiting that search also limits the kind of talent and experience organizations are finding. She emphasizes that Gen-Z professionals coming from Latinx communities “can show that they are adaptable... [and will be] someone who kind of continually flexes and builds and learns a new skill and adjusts, [and] I think that’s more the person who’s going to really succeed and grow.”

“*...more than 50% of Hispanics experience discrimination*”

Daisy Auger-Dominguez, a workplace strategist with experience at Moody's, Google, Disney, and Viacom, offers a key strategy to ensure that organizations are reaching those more diverse talent pools: outreach. “I think we need to find them where they're at,” she said in a conversation with Forefront. “It needs to be part of outreach efforts. It needs to be part of our language choices, and how we as organizations promote our job descriptions and our job opportunities.” She highlights organizations like Verizon, who are reaching out to Hispanic-serving institutions and building relationships with Latinx and Hispanic communities.

Even further, Daisy reminds us that Latinx talent is coming from a variety of backgrounds. They may be immigrants themselves or are a first- or second-generation immigrant. They may have been the first in their families to go to college or had grown up surrounded by college professors and lawyers. Daisy asks organizations to consider “how...you recruit across that universality [of Latinx experience], but also with intention and specificity?”

In short, organizations in the process of adapting to the changing demographics of the Gen-Z population must actively shift their hiring practices to reach a broader, more diverse community. This variety of experiences also produces a variety of valuable competencies and skills that will create a more dynamic and innovative workforce, so building those networks and expanding access to the Latinx community will only benefit an organization.

Workplace Challenges

With more Gen-Z Latinx professionals entering office cultures, there is also a need to address the various difficulties people from underrepresented communities face when they enter a predominantly-white field. In a 2019 Pew Research study about race in the United States, 58% of Hispanic populations report experiencing discrimination, and over a quarter of that percentage specifically connect that discrimination with the workplace.¹⁰ The Latinx professionals we have spoken with support that claim: at all levels, they faced more difficulties than their white colleagues in advocating for themselves and receiving the promotions they deserved.

Carolina Jannicelli, a Managing Partner at JP Morgan Chase and one of Fortune's Top 50 Most Powerful Latinas in Business, shared her experiences with us: "As a Latina...I have certainly achieved quite a bit careerwise. I will say that oftentimes, it has felt, and even looking

back, I have had to probably run twice as hard to get half as far, and that is just the reality of this system." Being Latina specifically—female and Latinx—has presented its own challenges to her, and advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace was also a deeply personal process for her. "I really was so completely terrified, frankly, of being myself," she said, "that I was compelled to learn about the activities and lifestyle and the things that my majority colleagues talked about and cared about and tried to weave my life into their stories, whether it was authentic or not."

A landmark 2016 study from the Center for Talent Innovation highlighted that 76% of Latinos "cover up" or repress certain aspects of their personalities at work.¹¹ This could mean anything from the way they looked to the way they talked to the name they used at work, and it translated into an undermining and repression of the value that Latinx professionals bring to the workforce.

“*....I have had to probably run twice as hard to get half as far...*”

“ ...if I wasn’t willing to make myself vulnerable and just trust that I was good enough...I wasn’t going to grow. ”

Jannicelli’s recognition of the stress covering up was causing her was a life-changing one: “I just got to the point where if I wasn’t willing to make myself vulnerable and just trust that I was good enough the way I was...I wasn’t going to grow.” This realization shocked her into action, “And, not surprisingly, [opening up] absolutely unleashed a whole new level of growth and relationship-building.” The skills and unique perspectives Gen-Z Latinx professionals are beginning to introduce to the workforce—ease in connecting across cultures and borders, technological proficiency, bilingual communication, flexibility, and adaptability, for example—are ones that will drive innovation and positive growth, and encouraging people to be authentically themselves and add their unique voice to the conversation is absolutely necessary.

And while this is a personal transformation that many Latinx professionals have to experience in order to truly be themselves at work, organizational culture must reshape itself to support that transition. Cindy Joseph works with organizations around organizational values, and she emphasizes that creating actionable values around diversity, equity, and inclusion are necessary and very difficult to establish. She asks, “What does that actually mean in terms of the way that people act? In terms of the way that people show up

for their peers? In terms of the way that people carry that out and live that out on a day-to-day basis?” Organizations are starting to focus on these questions, and Joseph has sensed that conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion have “begun to evolve” from forcing underrepresented groups to adapt to a majority culture to changing the culture and system to accept all people and backgrounds.

Such dramatic shifts involve an assessment of the unintentionally discriminatory policies and norms that make Latinx (and/or Gen-Z) professionals repress the unique gifts they bring to the workforce. Daisy Auger-Dominquez speaks to the power of micro-aggressions—defined by Merriam-Webster as “a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expressed a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority)” —in creating a hostile workplace culture where Latinx (or other underrepresented groups) professionals feel unable to express themselves without judgement or inferior treatment.¹² Conducting trainings and developing processes to ensure that staff are aware of these implicit biases and the effects of micro-aggressions in all areas of work, from hiring to daily work culture to promotion and staff-retention, are absolutely necessary to removing barriers for young Latinx professionals to enter and remain in the workforce.

Looking Forward

Whenever we speak with Latinx students and professionals about the future, we hear an overwhelming sense of hope and excitement. The Latino Donor Collaborative found that the Latinx population's total economic output (GDP) in 2017 was \$2.3 trillion, and they predict it will account for 24.4% of the GDP growth for the United States by the end of 2020.¹³ Latinx populations are reshaping the economy of the United States, and the workplace must follow suit.

Just as Latinx members of the Gen-Z population have grown up in a multicultural world and learned to navigate an increasingly diverse space that requires flexibility, curiosity, and creativity, so too will the workforce grow and adapt to foster that positive change. “Embracing change with curiosity is the mother of innovation. Full stop.” Carolina Jannicelli’s powerful statement is entirely true.

Fundamentally, this embrace of change requires a cultural transformation. As Blancero and colleagues write, “Maintaining the status quo is not in the best interest of a business, consumers, or shareholders and will not ensure success for the 21st-century organizations.”⁵ Changing the status quo to one that cultivates diversity and inclusion “helps companies attract and retain top talent,” according to a report from the Society for Human Resource Management.⁸

Cindy Joseph and Daisy Auger-Dominguez both emphasize that this begins with a dual focus of examining organizational culture in order to ensure a more accepting and culturally-aware workplace and building relationships with communities that produce diverse talent. Addressing the first focus means seriously examining company values and creating actionable steps to educate staff. Joseph puts the second focus simply when she says, “Start to get to know people. Start to get them access. Start to provide them coaching and resources that help them show up as their best selves when they’re going through the [interview] process.” One of the younger Latinx professionals we spoke with described such an experience with the firm she currently works with, and it was because “they went above and beyond, reaching out to me in advance to help me prep for the interview and make sure I [did] well” that she was able to get the job and thrive as much as she did.

In closing, we would like to share a powerful quote from Daisy Auger-Dominguez which truly reflects the Gen-Z Latinx population, who in 2020 could be about to start second grade or are just beginning to graduate college and enter the workforce:

“This is an amazing community of talented people. We bring such rich, rich magic with us to all of our work. We bring a sense of community, of humanity, of hard work. That is really what... When you have to define an ideal employee, those are the characteristics that whenever I had to define an ideal employee for hiring. You want someone that is culturally adept. You want someone that is agile. You want someone that is flexible. You want someone that is hardworking. You want someone that can engage with broad groups of people, you want someone that’s gonna be hungry. All of those things, whenever I say them, I always think, “That’s what Latinos are.” [laughs] This is what we have in spades. So walk into those rooms knowing that you deserve to be there.”

“*...walk into those rooms knowing that you deserve to be there.*”

Summary of Recommendations

Though not an exhaustive list, this short summary of recommendations should provide a helpful reminder for any organization or professional seeking to support, recruit, and/or retain young Latinx professionals.

Make Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion an Actionable Priority

Go beyond values and take actionable steps to improve workplace culture so that it is supportive of all minorities.

Develop Outreach Initiatives that Find, Educate, and Empower Young Latinx Populations

Find ways to build relationships with Latinx communities that will provide the adequate preparation for Latinx Gen-Z populations to enter the workforce.

Unlock Barriers in the Hiring Process

Create and employ strategies and technologies to prevent microaggressions and implicit biases from affecting the hiring process.

Ensure the Promotion of Latinx Professionals into Leadership Roles

Seek out and encourage Latinx leaders who can act as role models for staff.

For Latinx Professionals: Know That You Belong!

You have so much to give to this space (and any space): you more than deserve these opportunities, so seek them out and you will succeed.

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Additional Reading

Additional Reading about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

[For Me, Inclusion Was an Inside Job](#) (written by Carolina Jannicelli!)

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace | Tips for Starting a DEI Committee](#)

[Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in the Workplace](#)

Additional Reading about Latinx Communities

[For Me, Being Latino Means Living Between Two Worlds](#)

[“Yes, But How Latina Are You?”](#)

[5 Underrated Reads for Hispanic Heritage Month](#)

[Beyond American Dirt: the Best Books to Understand Latinx Culture](#)

[The Best Latino Books, According to Latinx Writers](#)