



Austin Area Minority Business Project: Evaluation Framework

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LINDQUIST
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About Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER):

HACER's mission is to provide the Minnesota Latino community the ability to create and control information about itself in order to affect critical institutional decision-making and public policy. General support for HACER has been provided by Minnesota-based philanthropic organizations and the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits.

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Background

The aim of the Austin Area Minority Business Project (AAMBP) is to stimulate entrepreneurship and economic vitality in Austin, MN by reducing legal barriers in immigrant status and business; thus, improve local economic development, empower underrepresented community members, improve accessibility to social services, and increase civic engagement.

The program is implemented by the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC), Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM), and the pro bono team of Lindquist & Vennum (L&V). LEDC supports community and economic development through immigrant business legal support, addressing common owner and employee issues.¹ ILCM assists immigrants in the workforce by improving or acquiring legal status for individuals and families. L&V's partnership leverages Bank of America funding through comprehensive pro bono legal services.²

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation cover the following questions:

- Who seeks assistance from this project and for what purpose?
- Is the current project strategy sustainable?
- How can this project assist in increasing local employment?
- Does this project directly or indirectly stimulate the development of local businesses and commerce?
- How does this project affect the efficient use of local real estates?
- Does this project make improvements in living conditions in underrepresented communities?
- How does this project help with community integration and engagement in local initiatives and leadership?
- Is the model used in this project generalizable?

Methodology

The evaluator team used qualitative methods for this evaluation. The multi-model qualitative evaluation relies upon a combination of document review, survey, phone-call interviews, and online data tracking in order to assess the questions of this evaluation. The Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER) supported process documentation,

¹ Including contracts, business legal structure, and taxes.

² Legal services in the areas of employment law, business law, real estate law, and high-need areas of immigration law.

impact measurement, and further research efforts that will become a tool for project continuance and duplication. HACER is responsible for developing 50-75 indicator questions and 3 evaluation tools, all available in English and Spanish.

IHCM, LEDC and L&V provided information and data generated through project activities. Individuals requesting specific services³ at the project office located in Austin, MN filled the required intake forms. These forms also tracked internal and external referrals.

A screening survey was designed for clients who requested either immigrant legal services or minority business services with the AAMBP team. This survey, as a supplement of IHCM and LEDC’s intake form, was filled out at the first or second meeting with clients, and collected detailed demographic information and service preferences. There were 24 questions in total, covering four categories and several sub-topics under each main category (see Table 1).

Table 1. Survey Structure

Main Topics	Sub Topics
Demographic Information	Name, Gender, Age, Address, Ethnicity, Originated Country and Language, Immigrant Status, Households, etc.
Home Ownership	Real Estate Property Ownership, Moving Times and Reasons, etc.
Health Insurance	Insurance Status, Healthcare Preference, Information Accessibility, etc.
Employment and Entrepreneurship	Employment Status, Business Ownership, Entrepreneurial Preference, Obstacles, Service Demands, etc.

In addition to the intake form and the screening survey, program documents such as partner meeting minutes, outreach activity lists, event memorandums, workshop flyers, and social media records were also analyzed. These evaluative materials indicated the strategies that the project team conducted to extend to an increased group of clients and potential community partners. Information accrued expressed the long-term objectives of this project, including business and entrepreneurial development, the improvement in civic engagement, and the increased accessibility to social service resources.

Finally, HACER conducted interviews in the form of questionnaires by issuing telephone calls to AAMBP current clients who had completed the intake survey; and to non-clients who had

³ Services regarding to immigration consults, business consulting services, or other civil legal services.

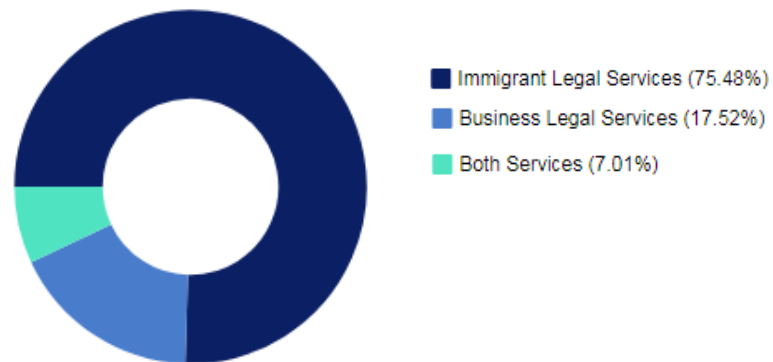
expressed interest in the Austin project but were otherwise ineligible. Interviews were completed to understand the effect that the project has had on minority communities around the area of Austin, MN; as well as to inquire whether services effectively satisfied the needs of clients as expected. In addition, the interviews were expected to project community members' behavior and attitude in terms of civic engagement and community prosperity, and to explore the capability the minority population may have in contributing to the sustainability of this project.

Results

Demographics of the target population

The intake forms and the screening surveys indicated that in Austin City and nearby areas there is a significant demand for Immigrant Legal Services followed by Business Legal Services, in few cases people demand both services (see Figure 1).

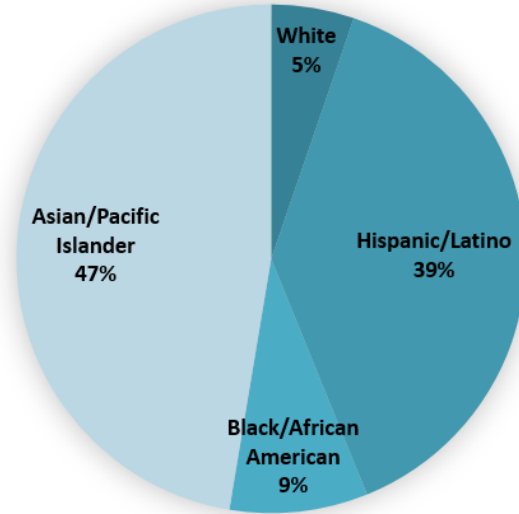
Figure 1. Demand of Services in Austin, MN



The program enjoys a diversified population. Among survey respondents, 29 were males and 28 were females, with 1 no answered, providing a near 1:1 gender ratio. Participants' age ranged from 15 to 65 and are categorized as follows: under 20 (6 respondents), between 20 and 30 (20 respondents), between 30 and 40 (17 respondents), and 40 and above (13 respondents), with 3 giving no response.

Most of the participants were Asian Americans (47%) mainly from Burma and Hispanics/Latinos (39%) mainly from Mexico (see Figure 2). In terms of location, the majority of respondents were in Austin City (40). Other locations include Albert Lee (10), Owatonna (2), Rochester (2), and St. Paul (1), with no data for 2 cases.

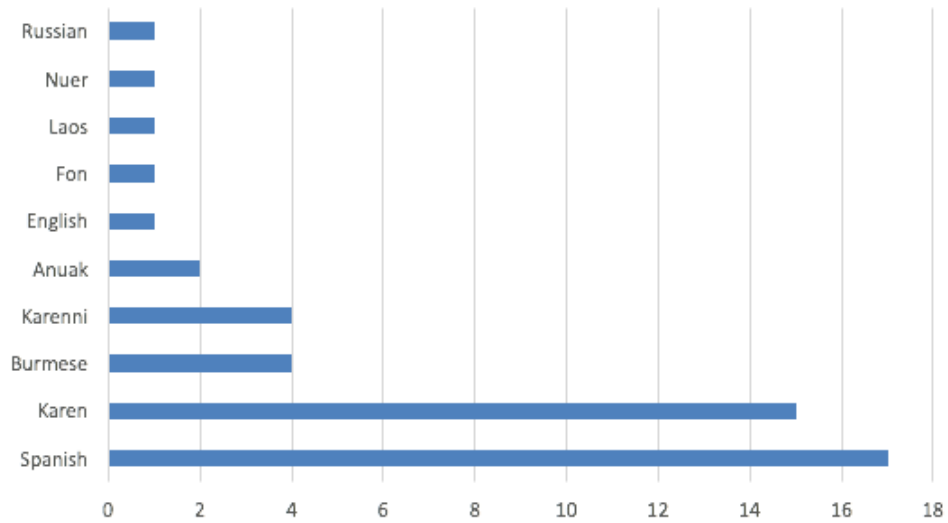
Figure 2. Ethnicity of Survey Respondents



No response: 1

The screening surveys and intake forms revealed that a large majority of respondents have lived in the U.S. for over three years (75%), with 19 respondents having lived here for more than ten years. Respondents speak different languages (see Figure 3), but Spanish and Karen are the most common. Nevertheless, 45.5% of the respondents stated to have Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

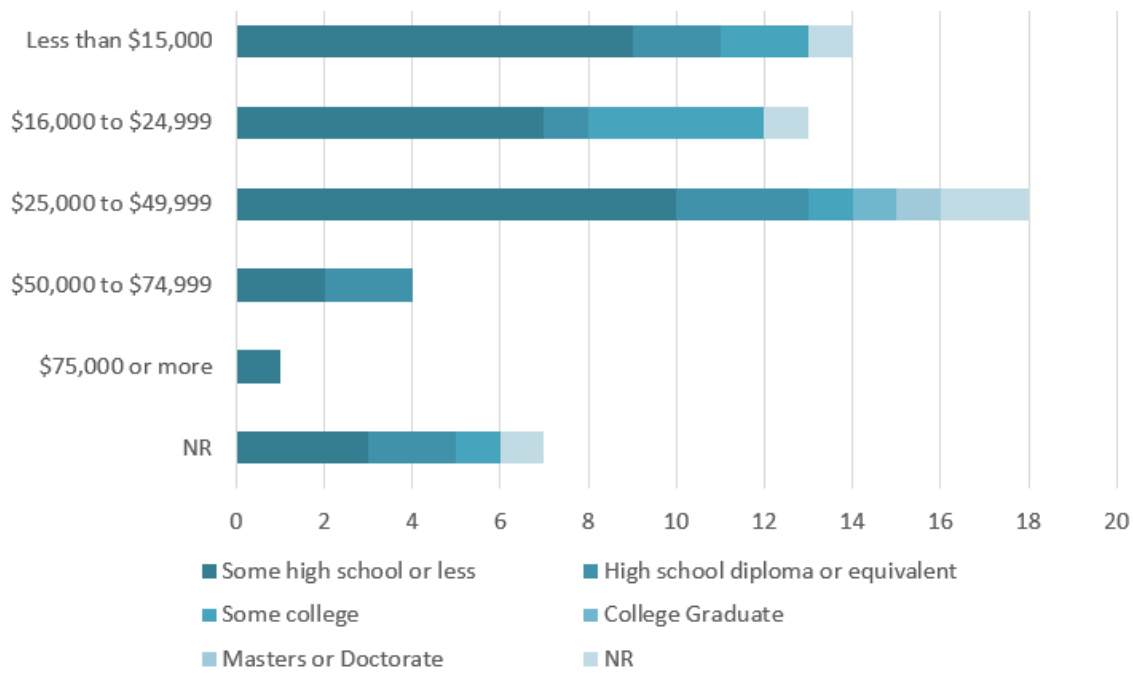
Figure 3. Languages spoken by Participants



No response: 10

The education level is low among participants. Of the respondents 56.1% have some high school or less, 17.5% have high school diploma, and 14% have some college. Only 1.8% reported to have masters or doctorate. Unfortunately, 8.8% did not respond or report incorrectly their education level. Low education levels are related to the socioeconomic status (see Figure 4). For instance, half of respondents with a household income of less than \$25,000 reported to have less than high school. In addition, the average size of households in this sample is four individuals. Taking into account the Poverty Income Guidelines (2017),⁴ it is possible to say that almost half of the households lived below the income poverty level. This is worrisome, considering than more than 80% of the families had at least one child under 17 years old.

Figure 4. Education and Income



Based on the responses, there were 30 families without real estate property in the U.S. (57.7%) and 15 owning a home in Austin, MN (28.8%). Most them have not moved during the past 12 months (67.9%). The rest of the families have moved once or twice (28.30%) and more than twice (1.9%) during the same period.

⁴ The poverty income for a household size of 4 is \$24,600. Information retrieved from <http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/personal-finance/dollarworks2/docs/poverty-income-guidelines.pdf>

Most of the respondents were working with hourly wages (52.9%) and others were self-employed (13.7%). Nevertheless, 17.6% were unemployed and searching for a job. Most self-employed were of Latino/Hispanic background. They own micro scale business, with annual revenues of less than \$25,000 and have obstacles accessing loans and investments. Of the total sample, 5 individuals reported to having the intention of starting a business yet encountering similar obstacles while seeking for financial support.

There is a necessity for strengthening links between clients and the organizations

ILCM and LEDC provided a list of sixty-six current clients from the surrounding area of Austin, MN. HACER contacted these clients with the aim of collecting information about their experiences with AAMBP team and their expectations for future services. On average, HACER tried three phone calls per client in a two-week period.

Current clients available for surveying were unresponsive to inquiries. Of the sixty-six clients telephoned, five were able to complete the questionnaire. Some clients were unfamiliar with either LEDC, ILCM or the pro bono team of L&V. In addition, clients did not recognize the names of those persons attributed to each center where services are provided. Finally, multiple clients informed that they did not have adequate English or Spanish to fulfill the questionnaire.

Based on those who were able to complete the questionnaire, the majority of clients were pleased with the services offered by the Austin Project. Most clients were seeking immigration services instead of assistance with their business. When in contact with the center in Austin, the majority of clients (4 out of 5) chose to directly contact their counselor assigned to their case by telephone. Additional comments expressed were of anticipation in regard to awaiting responses from the center of their cases. Of the five clients, two stated that while the center was extremely helpful, the processing time between their initial visits to awaiting whether their case was to be accepted was excessive in length (three months).

Many of the clients expressed that they did not view themselves as leaders in their community and many (4 out of the 5) were unable to state whether the program has affected their quality of life. Further research must be done to be able to take into consideration the needs of clients. The number of respondents to the questionnaire (5) compared to the total case of study (66) is by no means significant enough to generalize the outcomes of the project.

The provided list of non-clients of the Austin Center were furthermore phoned by HACER. The list consisted of 8 non-clients. Of those telephone numbers, 6 out of 8 were disconnected. One non-client participated in the survey. The non-client expressed disappointment in the outcome of his case denial, yet expressed great gratitude for services rendered.

Outreach events based on collaboration and communication

AAMBP staff participated in many community events for outreaching purposes. They released project information through multimedia, and conducted workshops to provide project information as well as direct screening services. Events information and project knowledge were released through social media such as Facebook, local channels, and local press. There were 21 events in total categorized in 6 different types of events during the pilot period (see Table 2). These events helped spreading out the project through word-of-mouth communication and media reports. For instance, the information of the Naturalization Workshop held by ILCM on December 2nd was released on the Facebook pages of ILCM, Austin Human Rights Commission, and Austin Adult Education, which was then share on more pages such as Multicultural Austin. This workshop was also covered by two local news channels and Austin Daily Herald⁵.

Table 2. Types, counts and highlights of outreach events

Type of Outreach Events	Counts	Highlights
Community Education	7	6 presentations; reached out over 40 community and civic leaders, 5 Austin Public Schools' staff, residents, immigrants, non-profits, etc.
Partnership Strengthening	3	Regular partnership meetings
Networking and Referrals	7	Connected with African Development Center, U of M Extension, Riverland faculty, employment counselors, Volunteer Lawyers Network, Albert Lea Catholic Church, Welcome Center, Centro Campesino, etc.
Organizational Development	1	Workshop for News Promoting.
Direct Services	2	Over 30 participants from 5 countries participated in Naturalization Workshop; 20 individuals received legal screen through workshops and events.
Advocacy	2	Reached out high ranking Mexican officials, Austin mayor and former mayor, and other leaders.

AAMBP has reached out to many potential clients, potential partners with aligned missions, and people with decision-making influence. Working with local media and community leaders was deemed especially important, because of their knowledge on communities, and their expertise

⁵ See Appendix A.

on how to reach out target population with available resources. Presenting the project to high-level administrators has been a good strategy considering future impact in public policy and decision-making process. This outreaching model is proved to be effective and will work out well in following months.

In addition, ILCM, LEDC, L&V, and HACER closely cooperated on project issues and activities. The members of the center attended events such as the *Vision 2020 5th Anniversary Party* to meet with community leaders and volunteers (over 100 in attendance). L&V conducted a pro-bono day in Austin where attorneys and associates worked together with clients. Furthermore, an outreach coordinated with the Volunteer Lawyers Network at the Mobile Mexican Consulate Event was held in Austin. This event had 180 attendees and opened the opportunity to perform three DACA immigration screens.

After visiting the center and working with the staff, many clients expressed an increase in motivation to conduct business in Austin. In particular, one client expressed interest in forming a non-profit with the aim to establish a Buddhist temple.

Since we did not ask for specifics in the intakes regarding these individuals, we will include this updated information as part of our descriptive analysis. In terms of the clients with children 18 and younger, we have collected data from those who have children 17 and younger in the household, yet by the nature of the evaluation we cannot establish that there was a direct positive benefit to these families.

Conclusion

Project partners closely cooperated and regularly communicated to make common effort, and the network has expanded by cooperating with community members. ILCM, LEDC, L&V, and HACER closely cooperated on project issues and activities. Monthly phone conferences were held on a regular basis, and meeting minutes were wrapped up right after communication. Continuous communication contributed to effective information sharing and problem solving. In particular, in the situation where the project staff and volunteers were working in Austin, while other partners were based in the Twin Cities.

Strengthening networks was important in expanding influence and community impact. Networking activities helped maintaining the sustainability of this project, and connecting with wider range of resources in the target area and surroundings. Other organizations serving other minority groups were also valuable and knowledgeable, complementing community members and organizations working with Latino/Hispanic population. Their support was relevant considering that several cases are out of AAMBPs' expertise or that there are language barriers.

Appendix A

The following are links of media reports on Naturalization Workshop:

- “First naturalization workshop in Austin gets residents one step closer to citizenship” by Shannon Rousseau posted on Dec 02, 2016. Available at <http://www.kttc.com/story/33857162/first-naturalization-workshop-in-austin-gets-residents-one-step-closer-to-citizenship>
- “Naturalization workshop draws full house” by Deb Nicklay posted on Dec 04, 2016. Available at <http://www.austindailyherald.com/2016/12/naturalization-workshop-draws-full-house/>
- “Efforts to help immigrants become U.S. citizens are underway” posted on Mar 16, 2017. Available at <http://www.kimt.com/story/34918911/efforts-to-help-immigrants-become-us-citizens-are-underway>
- “Naturalization Workshop to be held on Friday” posted on Mar 16, 2017. Available at <http://www.kimt.com/story/34918841/naturalization-workshop-to-be-held-on-friday>