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FAIR360

Hispanic Heritage Month: Navigating Success and Identity for Hispanic and Latinx Professionals

Hispanic Heritage Month, observed from September 15 to October 15, is a time to honor and recognize the invaluable contributions, history and culture of Hispanic and Latinx communities in the United States.

For companies, actively participating in and celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month is a moral imperative and a strategic move that fosters inclusivity, strengthens corporate culture and drives business success.

This Meeting in a Box is a valuable tool to share with employees as part of your organization's cultural competence education.

We will explore the distinct challenges Hispanic and Latinx professionals often face as they strive for success while navigating the intricacies of their identities. This Meeting in a Box also includes a timeline of Hispanic/Latinx accomplishments, events and data from Fair360's Top 50 Companies for Diversity.

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Breaking Down Barriers and Unlocking Success for Hispanic/Latinx Workers

The number of [Hispanics in the workforce](#) is expected to climb to almost 36 million in 2030. Despite their growing presence in the workplace, Hispanics often encounter unique challenges that can hinder their professional development, job satisfaction and well-being.

“A huge cost to businesses is training new employees, so removing barriers and fostering an inclusive workplace is an investment in retention,” says Jonathan Fisher, Chief Economist and Research Advisor at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth. “This not only benefits the company but benefits the workers and, ultimately, benefits the economy.”

Lack of Access to Good Jobs

The [unemployment rate](#) for Hispanic workers fell to 3.8% in 2022, a record low. However, the Center for American Progress (CAP) notes many more Hispanic and Latinx people would like to work but cannot find jobs. Among the Hispanic Americans with jobs, they tend to be concentrated in service occupations.

“When you look at the top occupations that Hispanic Americans tend to be employed in like chefs, cooks, drivers, laborers, maids, housekeeping cleaners, or childcare workers – those types of occupations tend to be low-wage occupations, with less access to paid family and medical leave,” says Rose Khattar, Director of Economic Analysis, Inclusive Economy at the CAP.

Experts cite education disparities as one of the reasons behind the lack of good jobs. [Research](#) indicates Hispanic students face lower high school graduation rates and are less likely to pursue higher education than their white counterparts.

“We need to work with the private sector to ensure they transfer the way they do their sourcing in their hiring into skills-based,” says Luis Quiñones, Deputy Vice President of Workforce Development and Adult Education at UnidosUS. “The way that they write their job descriptions. How they source those candidates. What is the process that they have in place to have a fair process that is equitable?”



Language barriers can also be a significant challenge for Latinx/Hispanic Americans.

“You were probably an engineer in Peru and came here,” says Quiñones. “You have the skill set, but you don't have the language. How do we mitigate that? How do we have programs that can work on contextualized language acquisition? They don't need to go to school for 12 years to learn all the English. They need to learn the English they will be using at their job because they understand the mechanics of it.”

Fewer Advancement Opportunities

Khattar believes the employment outlook for Hispanic Americans can be solved in two parts.

“You can meet them where they're at and lift up the quality of the jobs they were already working in,” she says. “You could raise the minimum wage, for example. You could mandate paid family and medical leave. On the other end, there are already jobs out there that are good quality jobs. So you need to create pathways for Hispanic Americans to be able to get into those jobs and have career advancement as well.”

Climbing the corporate ladder tends to be harder for Hispanic Americans. While they comprise 19% of the U.S. population, they only account for 4% of leadership positions.

“Coqual finds that Latinx professionals report fewer advancement opportunities overall. Thirty-two percent of Latinx men and 19% of Latinx women say their time to promotion is longer than their peers, and nearly one in four Latinx men say they have been passed over for promotion in favor of another colleague,” says Dr. Nathan M. Castillo, Ph.D., Vice President, Research at Coqual.

Companies can improve the career trajectory of Hispanic/Latinx professionals by establishing mentorship and leadership development programs that pair them with senior leaders. The connections can prepare workers for leadership roles within the company.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) that focus on Hispanic/Latinx culture and issues can also provide a platform for employees to connect, share experiences and advocate for their needs. Fair360's Top 50 Companies for Diversity have ERGs that focus on Latinx or Hispanic professionals.

Pay Inequality

Hispanic/Latino workers are overrepresented in low-wage occupations and are less likely to have employer benefits. The wage gap is among the factors holding back their economic mobility.

“Latino professionals make just 73 cents for every dollar earned by white Americans,” says Castillo. “Only 19% of working Latinos earn more than 50,000 per year, compared with 50% of non-Latino white workers.”

The disparity is even worse for Latinas.

On average, Latinas are paid 46% less than white men and 26% less than white women in the U.S., according

to [Lean In](#). This adds up to over a million dollars in lost income in the average Latina's career.

“Latinos tend not to negotiate their salaries, especially Latina women,” says Quiñones. “Culturally, we're meant to believe that we need to be grateful for every opportunity given to us. You put your head down and say, ‘yes, ma'am, thank you so much.’”

Hispanic students also face lower high school graduation rates and are less likely to pursue higher education than their white counterparts, contributing to the pay disparities.

“The higher levels of education you have, the more likely you are to earn higher wages, and Black and Hispanic people have lower rates of having a bachelor's degree,” says Manjari Raman, Program Director of the Project on Managing the Future of Work at Harvard Business School.

“That being said, there's ample evidence of discrimination in the labor market. Even if it's not overt or covert discrimination, the way hiring happens often is through social networks, which are mostly populated by white people.”

Fair360's Top 50 Companies for Diversity have systemic efforts to detect and correct pay equity and combat unconscious bias.



Employers can conduct regular pay equity analyses to identify and assess any disparities in compensation. Fair and transparent pay practices are also necessary to ensure that decisions are based on objective criteria and not influenced by ethnicity or other discriminatory factors.

Feelings of Exclusion

Hispanics participate in the labor market at higher-than-average rates. Yet, three-quarters of Hispanics don't feel included in the [workplace](#) and nearly half actively seek new jobs. Unhappy workers are two times more likely to quit.

Microaggressions, often rooted in unconscious bias, are subtle yet damaging behaviors that can perpetuate exclusion. Hispanics frequently encounter comments, stereotypes or actions that belittle their heritage or capabilities, creating an unwelcoming atmosphere.

"How many times have I heard, 'you speak English very well, for somebody who's not from here,'" says Quiñones. "What do you mean by that?"

Hispanic job seekers may also encounter bias during hiring, based on their names, accents or perceived immigration status. Similarly, discriminatory practices can impact promotions and salary negotiations.

Quiñones believes the lack of representation in leadership, mentoring opportunities and Hispanic/Latino-focused ERGs all contribute to Hispanics feeling excluded in the workplace.

"If you don't have those things in place, of course I'm gonna feel that I don't belong, that I'm not accepted. I'm not being celebrated and can't bring my full authentic self into my job," he says.



Hispanic Heritage Month Timeline

1859

Cigar factories built in Florida, Louisiana and New York brought an influx of working-class Cubans to the growing industry in the United States.

1865

U.S. Navy Seaman Philip Bazaar became the first Hispanic Congressional Medal of Honor recipient. Bazaar carried dispatch communications between soldiers onshore and the USS Santiago de Cuba during the assault on Fort Fisher off the coast of North Carolina.

1867

After the fall of the French monarchy, Mexico entered the Restored Republic led by President Benito Juárez, the first Indigenous Mexican president.

1880-1900

The 1880 census counted 333,000 people who could be identified as Hispanic, rising to 496,000 in 1900, roughly three-quarters of them born in the United States.

1910

The Mexican Revolution began as a revolt against President Porfirio Díaz. The railroads that had once served as a means for trade and development now served as the main escape from the violence of the revolution.



1914

The Panama Canal officially opened on Aug. 15, completed at the cost of more than \$350 million.



1918

The Hispanic American Historical Review printed its first issue. Latin American historians who felt the American Historical Association had marginalized their cultures sought to create an institutional structure that would provide a scholarly journal to examine Latin American history.

1928

Octaviano Larrazolo, a former New Mexico governor, became the first Mexican American U.S. Senator. He succeeded Andrieus Jones after winning the election to complete Jones' term while serving in the New Mexico State House of Representatives.

1929-1939

Supported by the U.S. Federal Government, cities and states conducted large-scale deportations of Mexican and Mexican American residents to Mexico. Roughly 355,000 to 2 million people were deported, including 60% who were first-generation U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, mainly children.

1942

World War II drastically changed U.S. views and policies toward Mexican immigration. The governments of the U.S. and Mexico jointly created the bracero (laborer) program, which encouraged Mexicans to come to the U.S. as contract workers to support wartime industries.

1947

The *Mendez v. Westminster School District* case sued four school districts for denying students entrance to Westminster Elementary School because they were Mexican. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals prohibited segregation in California public schools.

1952

Puerto Rico proclaimed its constitution and was approved by the United States Congress, officially establishing a formal government structure to include a legislative branch, an elected governor and a judicial system based on civil liberties.

1954

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Mexican Americans have equal protection under the law in *Hernandez v. State of Texas*.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower instituted a controversial program known as "Operation Wetback" in which the U.S. government detained and deported more than 1 million people. Rhetoric blaming immigrants for low wages led to the policy, which would only last a few months due to funding and a lack of support after agriculture was severely disrupted.

1959

Musicians Ritchie Valens, Buddy Holly and "The Big Bopper" J.P. Richardson died in a plane crash. Valens was the first Mexican-American rock and roll star, scoring four hit records in his eight-month-long career.

1962

Civil rights activists César Chávez and Dolores Huerta established the National Farm Workers Association

to advocate for migrant workers' rights. In the 1960s, it became the United Farm Workers of America.

1963

The last baseball game ever played at New York's historic Polo Grounds was the first and only Hispanic All-Star Game. Hall of Famers such as Roberto Clemente, Orlando Cepeda, Luis Aparicio and Juan Marichal were all featured in the game.

1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination based on race, sex, religion, color or national origin. The act, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, also created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to enforce federal job discrimination laws.



1965

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, better known as the Hart-Celler Act. The reform bill ended the quota system that allotted immigration opportunities based on country of origin. The act gave priority to highly skilled immigrants and those with families already living in America.

1968

Led by East L.A. teacher Sal Castro, about 10,000 students peacefully walked out of four schools, joined by parents and supporters. Police intervention sparked a riot, and the walkouts persisted for two weeks until demands were met. Soon after the HemisFair opening in San Antonio, Chicano students initiated walkouts, spreading to 100 high schools in 10 states via 39 Texas towns.

1973

After the U.S. government recognized "Hispanic," Miami embraced Spanish as its second official language, forming a bilingual department. Maurice A. Ferré later became the first Hispanic mayor of Miami and the first Puerto Rican to lead a major U.S. mainland city.

1975

The Voting Rights Act of 1975 made bilingual ballots a requirement in many areas.

1980

Fidel Castro announced that any Cuban who wished to leave may do so. Shortly after, Cuban Americans sailed from South Florida to the port of Mariel in droves to help those who wanted to leave, an event often referred to as the Mariel Boatlift. Over a period of five months, more than 125,000 Cubans arrived in South Florida.

1986

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities was founded to champion higher education for Hispanic students.

The Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility (HACR) was founded to advance the inclusion of Hispanic professionals in corporate America.

President Ronald Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, granting permanent legal status to 2.7 million immigrants but also increasing border security and deeming it illegal for employers to hire unauthorized workers knowingly.

1987

The National Hispanic Leadership Institute addressed the lack of representation of Latinas in corporations, politics and nonprofits.

1988

Dr. Lauro Cavazos became the first Hispanic to serve in a presidential cabinet when he was sworn in as Secretary of Education by Vice President George H.W. Bush.

1989

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen became the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress.

1990

Antonia C. Novello became the first woman and Hispanic surgeon general of the U.S.

1995

Dreaming of You, the posthumous album by Selena, became the first predominantly Spanish-language album to debut at No. 1 on the Billboard 200.

1993

Ellen Ochoa became the first Hispanic woman to go to space.



1999

California's controversial 1994 ballot measure called Prop 187, which sought to stop illegal immigrants from receiving benefits or public services in the state, was struck down by a federal court mediation. Judges labeled most of it as unconstitutional, declaring that the state cannot regulate immigration and that no child will be deprived of education or healthcare due to their place of birth.

2001

Representative Luis Gutiérrez proposed the first version of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, granting citizenship to those who entered the U.S. undocumented as children.

2003

Hispanics became the nation's largest minority group yet remained underrepresented in workforce leadership.

2007

America Ferrera became the first Latina to win Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series for her role in "Ugly Betty."



2008

Lin-Manuel Miranda's "In the Heights" won the Tony Award for Best Musical. Miranda produced the equally successful "Hamilton."

2009

Puerto Rican Sonia Sotomayor became the first Latina Supreme Court Justice.

Richard Gonzalez became the CEO of AbbVie, achieving status as one of the highest-paid CEOs without completing a college degree.

2012

The Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA) began under President Obama. It allowed those who entered the U.S. undocumented as children to have eligibility for a work permit and a two-year deferred action from deportation.

2017

"Day Without Immigrants" protests took place across the nation to show the government how valuable immigrants are to the economy. These protests received widespread media attention and increased awareness about immigration issues.

Geisha Williams, a Cuban American businesswoman, became the first Latina Fortune 500 CEO when she was promoted at PG&E.

2018

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez beat Joe Crowley, a longtime representative of New York's 14th congressional district. At 29 years old, she became the youngest woman ever to serve in the U.S. Congress.

2019

Cardi B became the first solo female rapper to win the Grammy for Best Rap Album.

2020

The Supreme Court blocked efforts to end DACA, ensuring that 700,000 young immigrants can work and study in the U.S. without fear of deportation.

18.7 million voters (around 1 in every 10 voters nationwide) were of Latin American descent in 2020, with a historic 53.7% of the Hispanic population eligible to vote. For the first time in the history of U.S. presidential elections, Latinos born in the U.S. voted at the same rate as naturalized citizens.

2021

U.S. Census Data revealed that the Hispanic population of Texas is now equal to the white population of the state before accounting for undocumented immigrants. This signaled a shift in the state's demographic makeup as Hispanic voters and consumers became the majority.

2022

Nicaraguan-born political commentator Ana Navarro officially became the co-host of the popular morning talk show "The View." She celebrated the designation by delivering an impassioned speech about representation on screen, an issue that persists for the Latinx community in America.

Karol G, a Colombian Reggaeton artist, was the first Latina to headline Lollapalooza. Her album, *Mañana Será Bonito* was the first fully Spanish-language album by a female artist to top the Billboard 200 chart. Karol G's *\$trip Love Tour* was also the highest U.S. grossing ever by a female Latin act at nearly \$70 million.



Former WNBA player Niesha Butler opened NYC's first Afro-Latina-owned STEM center, S.T.E.A.M. CHAMPS. Focused on engaging and inspiring youths, Butler aimed to enhance accessibility to STEM education.

2023

Edward Caban was named NYPD commissioner, becoming the first Latino to lead the nation's largest police department.



Patricia Guerrero was sworn in as the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court, making her the court's first Latina chief justice.

Meg Medina, a Cuban American novelist, was selected by the Library of Congress as the new National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. She is the first Latina to serve as National Ambassador in the program's history.

Global superstar Shakira was honored as Billboard's Woman of the Year at the first-ever *Mujeres Latinas en la Música*, or Latin Women in Music, gala.

Facts & Figures

Average Percent of Total Population of Fair360 Top 50 Companies that Identify as Hispanic/Latino



Employee Resource Groups and Supplier Diversity

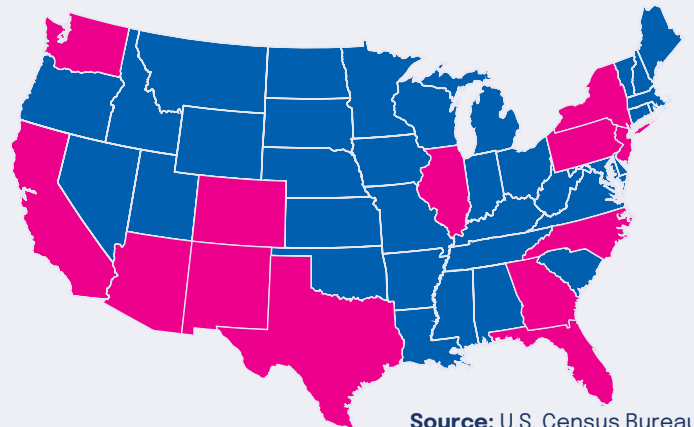


The Hispanic Population in the United States

As of July 1, 2021, the United States had a Hispanic population of **62.6 million**, representing the largest racial or ethnic minority group in the country, accounting for **18.9%** of the total population.

There are **13 states** with a population of **1 million** or more Hispanic residents:

- Arizona
- California
- Colorado
- Florida
- Georgia
- Illinois
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- Pennsylvania
- Texas
- Washington



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Navigating Identity: Latino, Latinx, Latine or Hispanic?

The cultural, ethnic, linguistic and national identities of people with Latin American and Spanish-speaking backgrounds are varied and multifaceted.

The terms used to describe them have evolved, reflecting changes in society's perspectives on gender inclusivity and cultural sensitivity.

Latino and Latina

"Latino" and "Latina" are perhaps the most commonly used terms to describe individuals of Latin American descent.

Spanish, like many languages, is deeply entrenched in gendered grammar.

Many argue that "Latino" and "Latina" fail to encompass the full spectrum of gender identities. "Latino" is still used by many people as a gender-neutral default.

Understanding Latinx & Latine

"Latinx" and "Latine" originated in Spanish-speaking LGBTQ+ communities as gender-neutral alternatives for people of Latin American heritage.

The terms have gained popularity, especially among younger generations and those identifying as non-binary, transgender or gender non-conforming.

While intended to be inclusive, some Latinos argue that "Latinx" is offensive. Detractors say the term is an English construct, doesn't follow the traditional structure of the Spanish language and is difficult to pronounce.

Pronounced Latin-ay, the letter "e" in "Latine" is intended to be more inclusive of gender identities and conforms with Spanish pronunciations.

The Complexities of "Hispanic"

"Hispanic" is widely recognized and used to describe individuals with origins in Spanish-speaking countries, including Spain.

The term was coined by the U.S. government for demographic purposes in 1980.

"Hispanic" has been criticized for focusing on language rather than culture. Some individuals feel it oversimplifies the rich diversity of backgrounds within the community.



Hyphenated Identities

Latinos and Hispanics in the U.S. come from countries with distinct histories, languages and traditions.

Hyphenated identities like Mexican-American, Dominican-American or Puerto Rican-American allow them to bridge the gap between their cultural roots and American experiences.

Words Matter

When referring to people of Latin American and Spanish-speaking backgrounds, it's important to consider both cultural sensitivity and individual preferences.

Fifty-seven percent of Hispanic Americans said they don't care what label is used: "Hispanic," "Latino," "Latinx" or another term, according to a 2022 Gallup survey. While 23% prefer "Hispanic," 15% of those surveyed said they favor "Latino." Only 4% say they prefer the term "Latinx."

"Language is evolving, as society evolves, as people evolve," says UnidosUS' Luis Quiñones. "As new generations grow up and want to be more inclusive, language matters. My stake on it is, if it's a push for inclusivity, I support it. But if a Boomer tells me please call me 'Latina' or 'Latino,' I have to respect and honor it because that's the way they feel about their own identity."



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Q** How can we actively engage in conversations with Hispanic/Latinx colleagues to better understand their experiences and perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of their identities?
- Q** In what ways can employers and employees promote and celebrate the cultural diversity that Hispanic/Latinx employees bring to organizations?
- Q** What innovative ideas or actions can employees propose to leadership to promote a more inclusive and supportive workplace for Hispanic/Latinx colleagues?
- Q** How can you ensure your own behavior and interactions reflect a commitment to inclusivity, contributing to a workplace where Hispanic/Latinx employees can thrive?
- Q** What steps can you take to continuously educate yourself about the cultural backgrounds and experiences of Hispanic/Latinx colleagues to promote understanding and respect?

