

“MÁS INFORMACIÓN”:

An Information Needs Assessment of Latino Immigrants in Oakland California



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KEY FINDINGS

From El Tímpano’s nine months of immersive research, interviews with community leaders, surveys of 250 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. The following are key takeaways:

1. DEARTH OF LOCAL NEWS AND INFORMATION

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 “I don’t have information” or “I don’t know where to find information” on issues that are important to them. “More information” was one of the most common survey responses to the question, “What would you change about the local news media?”

2. MEDIA SPARKS FEAR

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 one community organizer, explaining that the news broadcasts one negative story after another without equipping viewers with information they can use to take action. Several people expressed a concern that Spanish-language news may do more harm than good by habitually depicting immigrants as victims.

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

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.

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Workshop participants said they wanted resources and information that allow them to better engage on issues important to them—issues such as education, health, housing, employment, and the illegal dumping of trash in their neighborhoods. 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.

4. COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS & STRONG SOCIAL NETWORKS ADDRESS INFORMATION NEEDS

The main way many residents 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.

We found dozens of residents eager to be engaged and involved in their community, and who take time each month to attend meetings where they connect with neighbors, speak directly to city officials, and engage on issues impacting their communities.

5. 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.

6. NO CENTRAL SOURCE FOR TIMELY, LOCAL INFORMATION

Many communication channels used by municipal agencies and civic organizations, such as email, Twitter, and NextDoor, are not frequently utilized by Latino 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, the 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.

7. FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THEIR STORIES

The news outlets Oakland’s Latino immigrants 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 fail to include the Latino immigrant community. Many of the pressing issues that emerged in conversations with residents are absent or under-reported in English-language news, and unaddressed by the larger community.

You can find the entire report, “Más Información: An Information Needs Assessment of Latino Immigrants in Oakland California,” at www.internews.org/resource/mas-informacion. To start a discussion with El Tímpano about partnering to address these issues, reach out to hola@eltimpano.org.