



IMPACT PLANNING • EVALUATION • AUDIENCE RESEARCH



UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITIES STUDY:

AUDIENCE RESEARCH

HISPANIC AND LATINO RESIDENTS OF NEW JERSEY

Prepared for
New Jersey Historical Commission (NJHC)
Trenton, NJ

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STUDY BACKGROUND

The New Jersey Historical Commission (NJHC) initiated the Understanding Communities Study with the goal to better understand how New Jersey history and history organizations can be more inclusive for all. NJHC contracted RK&A for the first phase of the study to conduct focus groups with members of Hispanic and Latino communities in New Jersey. NJHC is focusing on Hispanic and Latino communities in New Jersey for the first phase of the study because Hispanics and Latinos are the second largest racial or ethnic group in the state behind Caucasian/white. NJHC plans to expand the study to other communities in the future. The New Jersey Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development served as advisors in the project.

NJHC's goals for this study are to:

- ◆ Broaden participation in NJHC programs, particularly focused on Hispanic and Latino communities.
- ◆ Support NJHC partners across the state to broaden their participation (i.e., not operate in a vacuum).
- ◆ Help build new partnerships with Hispanic/Latino communities for future program development (such as developing programs that are meaningful and engaging, particularly looking ahead to the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution).
- ◆ Foster a learning consciousness among the heritage community so that it may better connect with communities.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are to explore focus group participants':

- ◆ Awareness and past engagement with history organizations
- ◆ Perceptions of history in general
- ◆ Perceptions of New Jersey history
- ◆ Interest in opportunities offered by NJHC and its partners
- ◆ Barriers to participation in opportunities offered by NJHC and its partners

METHODOLOGY

With support from NJHC partners, RK&A conducted three focus groups with members of Hispanic and Latino communities across New Jersey in November 2018 and one additional

group in March 2019. A focus group convenes approximately ten individuals to discuss a topic under the direction of a skilled moderator. The moderator encourages interaction among participants and assures that the conversation remains on topic. Focus groups are most useful for uncovering attitudes, thoughts, opinions, and knowledge about a particular issue. They present a forum for understanding people’s perceptions of issues. Focus groups produce qualitative data and are especially valuable data collection tools because the social nature of focus groups allows participants to build off and respond to one another’s thoughts and experiences.

Focus group participants were recruited by four NJHC partners: Cumberland County Cultural and Heritage Commission; Middlesex County Office of Art and History; Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission; and Passaic County Cultural and Heritage Council. Partners recruited participants that met the following criteria:

1. **Identify as Hispanic or Latino**, per the [Census Bureau](#). This includes anyone who identifies their origins as:
 - Puerto Rican
 - Cuban
 - Mexican
 - South American (including specific country origins, such as Argentinian)
 - Central American (including specific country origins, such as Costa Rican).
2. **Live¹ in New Jersey, preferably the county of the focus group.**
3. **Engage with local arts and/or cultural organizations or festivals in their free time, but not necessarily with history organizations.** For instance, they may participate in activities through the local arts council, but they have not visited a local historic site.

Focus groups were held in the cities in which partner organizations are located: Bridgeton, New Brunswick, Paterson, and Toms River. Each focus group had between 7 and 11 participants and lasted at least 90 minutes, with two groups lasting over two hours. The moderator used a script (see Appendix B) and handouts with examples of the NJHC’s past projects and events to facilitate the discussion. The focus groups were audio recorded with participants’ permissions. Participants were paid a \$50 honorarium for their time.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

The data are qualitative, meaning that results are descriptive. In analyzing the data, the evaluator studied the transcripts produced from the audio-recording of focus groups for meaningful patterns and trends. The objectives of the study, as well as our professional experience, informed the analysis. Findings are reported in narrative, supplemented with exemplary

¹ We have consciously avoided the term “resident.”

quotations from participants. Trends and themes in the data are presented from most- to least-frequently occurring. Verbatim quotations from interviews (edited for clarity) illustrate participants' thoughts and ideas as fully as possible. The interviewer's questions appear in parentheses. Within quotations, an asterisk (*) signifies the start of a different speaker's comments.

When describing the findings, this report uses qualitative data terms such as “most” and “several,” as is appropriate for the sample size and the type of data collected. Such descriptive language is intended to provide readers with a sense of the general trends. Readers should regard the trends as general categories rather than rigid numerical counts.

We have reported findings by each focus group to respect the uniqueness of each group. Focus groups are reported in the order in which they are conducted. Following the reporting by focus group, we have included a summary that identifies patterns across groups. We have also included recommendations for NJHC.

LIMITATIONS

As you read the findings, keep in mind the following potential limitations:

- ♦ **Hispanic and Latino is a broad category that encompasses many individuals of different cultures and experiences.** NJHC and RK&A acknowledged this early in planning the project. While in our work with NJHC partners we expressed our desire to recruit a diverse range of individuals with different backgrounds and experiences, we recognize that the focus groups will likely reveal a limited sampling among the broader Hispanic and Latino communities in New Jersey.
- ♦ **Focus group participants were recruited by community partners.** This offered many benefits, including reducing study expenses and creating firsthand connections between NJHC partners and the Hispanic and Latino community. However, this strategy also introduces potential recruitment bias as partners relied on their connections with the community. Notably, though, the Executive Director for the Center for Hispanic Policy, Research and Development within the state department offered some assistance in suggesting connections.
- ♦ **The moderator of the group was not Hispanic or Latino.** The moderator called attention to this limitation with each group. The groups were conducted in English, but the moderator encouraged participants to speak in Spanish if they felt they could best articulate their ideas this way. This happened twice, once in New Brunswick and once in Toms River, and the moderator then relied on another participant to translate.
- ♦ **While NJHC staff were not present during the focus groups, NJHC partners were.** It was beneficial for the NJHC partners to be present as they had recruited the participants, could respond to questions participants had about local happenings, and thus, were able to strengthen their relationship with the group. However, their presence might have discouraged a few participants from being fully forthcoming about their awareness and perceptions of NJHC.

PATERSON (PASSAIC COUNTY) FINDINGS

The Paterson focus group was held on Wednesday, November 14 at 10:30am in the reading room of the Hamilton Club. There were 10 participants in the group and they ranged in age. The moderator observed that many participants seemed to know each other. Several greeted each other by name, with hugs and kisses. By comparison, two participants did not seem to know other participants.

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS

After the moderator provided initial welcome statements and explanations, the moderator asked each person to introduce themselves by name and with a little information about themselves. Some introductions were very lengthy, and the familiarity among most participants was evident.

Many participants are long-time residents of Paterson, or their families have deep and long ties to Paterson. For instance, several participants recalled they or their families moving to Paterson in the 1950s or 1960s (see the quotations). Participants often used the word “love” and “home” when describing their history with Paterson. Participants in the group were extremely proud of their city. This was evident through statements, such as, “I’m a proud Patersonian:” as well as in the extended and enthusiastic commentary about the diversity and history of their city.

“We moved to Paterson in 1963, so even though I am in West Paterson now, this is really home. It still feels like home.”

“I was in Paterson for more or less 51 years. Last year in November, probably one year from now, our daughter that owns a house in Bloomfield, convinced me and my wife to rent out the building and an apartment. And then we moved to Bloomfield. Clearly, I am still missing Paterson.”

Many participants are well connected to the community through their jobs or volunteer work. Participants included several who worked for the city government or have close connections to city government, and a few who worked in the local school district. Many also expressed interest in arts and culture and how important it is to Paterson.

Many identified their specific heritage, although their Paterson identity was prominent. Only a couple of participants identified their heritage in their initial introductions. However, when prompted specifically, many described themselves as Colombian, Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, Puerto Rican, Uruguayan, Colombian-American, and Puerto Rican-American. Again, this specific Hispanic or Latino identity seemed secondary to being a Patersonian. For instance, one participant notes: “even though I’m Puerto Rican, I feel like I’m more Patersonian than I am Puerto Rican.”

PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY

Participants in the Paterson focus group connect to history on a personal level through their family histories and their own experiences living in Paterson over many years. In fact, history is so ingrained in participants' beings that they were somewhat stymied by the question, "When you hear the word 'history' what comes to mind for you?" and expressed concern they were not responding to the question correctly.

Several participants indicated that conversations with family members are one of the most important sources from which they learn about their personal and community history, although they are rarely documented or formally recorded. Several talked about the struggles their parents experienced immigrating to the United States, their own experiences adjusting to life in a new country while maintaining a connection to their heritage, or how the Hispanic and Latino communities have become increasingly important to the fabric of the community starting in the early 1950s as more and more Hispanics and Latinos settled in New Jersey (see the first quotation). Participants were generally quick to recollect the history of their families' arrival in Paterson and more generally how different connections were made between Paterson and specific Hispanic and Latino communities. For example, one participant talked about how the Colombian population, including their father, emigrated to Paterson (see the second quotation).

Participants also expressed deep connections to and sincere love for the town of Paterson. Several were palpably excited at the potential to share Paterson's history with others as a way to elevate outsiders' perceptions of the town, which they said can be perceived as a rough place. In expressing their pride for Paterson, a couple of participants shared examples of the interesting evolution of some historic buildings in Paterson, such as a school for the poor that eventually became the building for the Paterson Board of Education, and the craftsmanship behind a "beautiful work of art fireplace" inside what is now an insurance agency building. Another said she would like to see "some type of campaign and awareness of these amazing families that have built Paterson, from generations on" so that people will understand that Paterson is a "family-oriented city, a city of intelligent people that have education...not just gangs and drugs and what you see in the news."

"My parents came to the Bronx in '52 and in '53 started visiting Paterson. In '54 the family moved here – in fact moved right over here to Prince Street...there were already pockets of Puerto Rican families here, up on North Third Street, 16th Avenue. The early ones, the ones that came here early either worked in factories or had businesses...There were a few grocery store owners, and that's where the people used to meet and talk about politics, if you will...that was back in the early fifties."

"With the Korean War, Colombia helped the US, so the US said, 'Well, there's a city in the United States called Paterson. They have a lot of manual work and you can go over there and start working.' So all these Columbians in the fifties and sixties came here and started working at the textile factories, and that's how my father got here back in '68."

A few talked about the connection between history and their cultural identity in an immigrant community, sharing that personal history is important for the current generation of Hispanic and Latino youth so that they can see representations of others who have gone through similar experiences (see the first quotation). A few talked about how language is interconnected with history—history is communicated and preserved in two languages (Spanish and English). For example, one participant observed: “We preserve history. We talk to each other, and we do it in two languages and in different phrases and sayings.” Participants talked about the nuances between communicating in English and Spanish, as well as the unique language characteristics of Hispanics and Latinos from different backgrounds (e.g., Puerto Rican versus Argentinian versus Columbian). Similarly, some participants talked about the unique culinary traditions that are tied to their personal and community history or spoke more generally about the diversity of cultures under the umbrella of Hispanic and Latino (see the second excerpt with three speakers). For example, one participant said “different traditions, different history, different passions, different foods.”

Finally, a few thought about the role of Hispanics and Latinos in the history of the United States at large. For one, Hispanic and Latino history in the United States is a story of opportunity and freedom and aligns with the country’s history as a place for immigrants of all origins, but they also said some Americans seem to have forgotten their own “roots” as immigrants too.

Another said Hispanic and Latino history in the United States is often misunderstood. This participant recalled that when the United States purchased land that belonged to Mexico, the political boundaries moved, but many Mexican people remained on the land suddenly was a part of the United States. A few others touched more generally on the complexity of identity as people have immigrated from different countries with different traditions.

“I’m Columbian-American and Puerto Rican-American...having those three elements and learning how to speak Spanish in America was an interesting kind of situation, because you’re Latin at home, American on the streets and in school, so trying to melt those two roles was very interesting. For me it’s important to the future of Latinos in America to get them to be comfortable and represented in that way... It’s a hard thing to grapple with...Growing up I didn’t have representation or someone to look to for that.”

“When I came back a year ago, I was in shock because I remember the Italian cafes, and now it’s all Columbian. I’m half Columbian so I love it. I can get what I want—you know, it’s my country right there. It’s very interesting to see how these little pockets that were once Irish or whatever are now Dominican or Columbian or Puerto—it’s really amazing.”

* “Population-wise the Dominicans are the largest Hispanic population now in Paterson, then Puerto Rican, then Peruvian, and then Columbian. And then of course you have so many others.”

* “You can eat your way through here!”

[Laughter]

AWARENESS & PAST ENGAGEMENT WITH HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS

Since participants responded in such length to questions about how they perceive history, the moderator did not ask the group specifically about their awareness and engagement with history organizations. Much could be gleaned from the conversation, regardless.

Several participants spoke about local history organizations and cultural events happening in Paterson. Several were familiar with a current rehabilitation project related to the Great Falls National Historic Park organized through the Hamilton Partnership, as well as an oral history project and a choreography project organized around the Falls. Two mentioned familiarity with cultural events in the area, including the Spanish-Italian-American Parade in Paterson and the Hispanic Heritage Parade in New York City. One was familiar with a project through the Newark Library intended to research and organize the history of Latinos in New Jersey “a number of years ago,” but said the project was halted when a new governor was elected.

However, one participant also said she thought there was limited awareness within the Paterson community about current historic resources within the city. This participant said people from one ward within the city (of which there are six wards) may not have visited resources located in another ward, for example Great Falls or the Paterson Museum (see the quotation). Others nodded in agreement to the participants observation. Keep in mind that this particular group seems particularly keyed into happenings in the community, so this result is notable as it also suggests there may be a greater lack of awareness outside the group.

“And do you know that there are people here that live in the second and the third and the fourth ward, and they have never gone to the waterfalls? There are people here that have never gone to the museum. There are people here that don't know anything about where they're living or what Paterson is about.”

Additionally, participants were asked specifically about their awareness of the NJHC before the focus group. Two said they were familiar with the organization although they did not offer specifics of their familiarity. Furthermore, the moderator did not ask a specific question about their awareness of the work of Passaic County Cultural & Heritage Council (PCCHC), although participant responses suggest they are more aware of PCCHC than NJHC. Yet, there were several questions about PCCHC's work, suggesting awareness may be limited and/or superficial.

INTEREST IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

After the moderator shared some examples of NJHC projects, most participants reacted positively to the opportunities provided by NJHC. Participants expressed strong interest in opportunities to highlight or expand on the history of Hispanics and Latinos in Paterson, particularly as a way to elevate both residents' and visitors' perceptions of Paterson. Participants quickly began generating ideas for projects they would be interested in. Some of the ideas mentioned during the focus group included:

- ◆ **Great Falls project:** Many were enthusiastic about a project that would explore the history of Great Falls and its connection to the Paterson community. Some see the Falls as the “heart” of the community and a main attraction for tourists. One participant suggested “actually telling some of this oral history onsite at the Falls, to be documented and also shared” as a “powerful way to get the history off the page, out of the book.” Other participants supported this idea and also thought the Falls could be the setting for other cultural events, such as a dance choreographed by a Paterson choreographer.
- ◆ **Oral history:** Several participants thought a project recording oral histories from community members would be a valuable project, and one that likely would not get done without grant resources to support the capacity needed to complete an oral history project (see the first quotation). One participant suggested using these oral histories as part of exhibits or programming.
- ◆ **Local history community program:** One suggested that, considering many people in Paterson don't explore the historic resources in their own city, a community program that helped residents explore local sites would be a good project for an NJHC grant. She suggested this would help instill local pride in the community and build relationships with residents in different parts of the city.
- ◆ **Year-round programming:** One suggested that programming should aim to happen year-round and not just during Hispanic Heritage Month (see the second quotation).

“We'd rather talk [about our history], but nobody wants to write. Nobody wants to print it – you know, type it up and get it printed. So, you definitely need a way where people can tell you the story...and then somebody else is going to type it, make it – improve it, and then put it into print. I think that would be a great project to do.”

“Can I just point out, I don't want us to concentrate on only Hispanic Heritage Month because we are Hispanics all year long, every day, every minute. And in order for our children to find their identity we need to be exposing them to all these cultures, not only September and October.”

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

Participants were asked what barriers they saw to working with NJHC and using the resources the NJHC offers. Participants said the primary barrier for them would be the process of applying. Participants had questions about who was eligible to apply for the grants, what the application process entailed, and who they could reach out to for help if they got “stuck” trying to complete the application.

However, NJHC partners from PCCHC were quick to jump into the conversation to offer help. One PCCHC staff welcomed participants to use PCCHC as a “bridge” in the process. Additionally, another PCCHC staff offered to serve as a sounding board for ideas. After PCCHC responded to some of their queries, the participants did not feel there were many barriers to participation and were eager to pursue opportunities. In fact, one participant from this group reached out to the moderator after the focus group, who then connected the participant to NJHC to discuss a proposed project.

NEW BRUNSWICK (MIDDLESEX COUNTY) FINDINGS

The New Brunswick focus group was held on Wednesday, November 14 at 5:30pm in a classroom at Middlesex Community College. There were 11 participants in the group that appeared mostly middle-aged or younger. The moderator observed that some participants seemed to know each other, although there was less familiarity among participants than evident in Paterson.

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS

After the moderator provided initial welcome statements and explanations, the moderator asked each person to introduce themselves by name and share a little information about themselves.

Some participants are long-time residents of New Brunswick. The majority of participants said they have lived in New Brunswick for 15-20 years or more. While not using these words specifically, several participants alluded to themselves as the first generation to the area, which is in contrast to Paterson participants who described a longer duration of their families' residence in their community. Additionally, a few participants, two of which were Rutgers's students, had moved to New Brunswick within the past few years.

All participants have a strong interest in culture and the arts. Participants included individuals who work in a variety of capacities: the city government, the university and community college, and arts and cultural organizations. Whereas the community was a unifying interest in Paterson, arts and culture is a unifying interest among participants in New Brunswick—be they artists, interns, or otherwise. Several said they were active advocates for Hispanic and Latino issues.

Many identified their specific Hispanic or Latino heritage, and it was a primary identifier. Unlike in Paterson, most individuals identified their Hispanic and Latino identity quickly in their introductions (see the quotations), which included Colombian, Costa Rican, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Uruguayan. Notably, each New Brunswick participant came to the group with unique perspectives and passions.

"I immigrated from Costa Rica about 30 years ago, and as a Costa Rican, I feel I am around kindred souls here [in the focus group]—people who care about our culture and our traditions and our families and our community and feel that knowledge, that love to try to keep our communities together."

"I'm a recent alumna of Rutgers University. I studied Caribbean studies. I'm Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Chinese."

There was a sense of urgency and intensity in comments not present in the Paterson focus group. For this reason, the conversation sometimes did not lead to consensus but articulation of multiple different experiences. The following excerpt, edited down, exemplifies how the focus group conversation flowed.

Moderator: “Is there anything else you want to share or talk about in terms of how you talk about your heritage or identity or things that you feel like are important for the commission to know?”

Participant 1: “What I said before that has been a challenge always to be acknowledged as—we’ve always been described as migrants, undocumented people... Our work has been to tell people, ‘Yeah, certain people lack documents, but we have very diverse culture and beautiful culture.’ We have our own traditions that embrace values, and those values are very important for future generations to learn from. And the challenge has been to be respected by the knowledge.... **So being Mexican, being women has been a huge challenge because we always feel that our culture has been manipulated or used or abused.... But at the end, many doors have been closed for us: the access to the resources, the access to the location.... We ask can you help me with this, can you help me with that, can you please guide me with this...** And we living in a hypocrisy of saying: ‘Cinco de Mayo, let’s celebrate Mexico.’ But then later on, all the whole year, let’s push them down, let’s show they not welcome here. I think, me, personally, having always that fight. That fight like yes, we have these challenges but we also have this beautiful right. We want to be heard, and we want to be respected. And we want to have the opportunity to learn how to apply for these grants. How to teach young people to write for history of traditions and show the values because that is what key for us in terms of cultural values. [Refer to another participant by name] has been doing this within these dances within these songs and festivals is a meaning. And that meaning has to be highlighted. But sometimes we don’t know how to write it in proper English. And I think that’s why Middlesex County or Rutgers University opened opportunity by having interns that help us to write that and teach both sides. **And that’s what we always going to be fighting for, and I say fight because it’s not easy.** You [referring to another participant] were talking about businesses. We are the biggest group in the state, Latina contribution, right? We don’t have contribution for these businesses to continue cultivating the arts and this institution—that unless you know the professor, or the director, you have the opportunity to say, ‘Hey, I need your support. I need your guidance.’ How can I talk to this man? How can I bring more students to help us? And I think more you women... Mexico has a very patriarchal way of thinking. I don’t know whether Colombia is as well but Mexico has been discovering that I [as a female] also have a voice, I also count.”

Participant 2: “I would like to contribute a little bit to that. I think that as Latinos we are very modest about our own talents and our own successes and our own achievements. For instance, how many people actually when they have advertising and talking about Mexican cuisine.... How many people go beyond the chimichangas and the tacos?... **We already, actually, we are very, very, low key because it’s learned. Fear, honesty, modesty that goes with our teaching. That is engrained** ...It’s starting to tell the world we are as good as them as we strive for better. And until we do that, we are going to be struggling for recognition because we have to help others value us.... We have to be an ambassador. We have to be our own advocate for greatness.”

PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY

New Brunswick focus group participants had a wide range of perceptions about history. Most notably, participants talked about the importance of maintaining ties to their Hispanic and Latino heritage and passing this knowledge to the younger generations. A few expressed concerns that “there’s a lot of history that’s not being shared” because the younger generations, who are second- or third-generation immigrants do not have as strong of ties to their family history and heritage (see the first quotation). They said they were concerned some aspects of history are being lost over time because they are not shared or recorded.

Paralleling comments in the Paterson focus group, participants said the past and present are intertwined for Hispanic and Latinos as they navigate their identities with ties both to their Hispanic and Latino heritage and their current place in the United States (or New Jersey specifically). One participant said they struggle with how to maintain their identity (see the second quotations). Another participant said the challenge for Hispanic and Latino youth to “find themselves, validate themselves, and their personal and family histories” is exacerbated when students “don’t see themselves” in the history taught in schools.

A few participants also talked about the diversity of Hispanic and Latino history and heritage. Participants were passionate about celebrating the distinctions across Hispanic and Latino culture “to keep the culture alive.” For example, one said, “I understand we came from 22 different countries and each country, we came from 20 or 30 ethnicities...I learned to say things 21 different ways just being exposed to different cultures.” One participant described their desire to help lift other Hispanic and Latino ethnicities up through the celebration of each culture within the Hispanic and Latino community. Relatedly, one talked about how Hispanic and Latino cultural programming sometimes overemphasizes just one aspect of culture, such as salsa music, rather than presenting a “holistic” perspective of Hispanic and Latino culture.

“Personally, being Puerto Rican, I see we’re losing our culture little by little, and that is of high concern to me. There’s a lot of good history out there that’s not being passed on. When you have people migrating here and then you have generation after generation, we have young people growing up who don’t know a lot of history. Who don’t even know, I mean some of the key things.”

“I’m the child of immigrants from Uruguay, and for me, that history was passed down from my parents but also my grandparents. I had a really close relationship with my grandma growing up. History is like kind of what you embody—the people that you love that teach you the history, you embody them.... “Then how am I going to maintain my roots here, right? How do I also maintain a connection with the place that my family comes from because that informs [my identity] just as much as being influenced by people that are still in Uruguay. It’s difficult but history is here today just as much as in the past.”

Further, a few discussed the difficult or unpleasant associations they have with history. For instance, one participant recalled not being interested in United States history because they needed to just focus on improving her own situation as a first-generation immigrant (see the first quotation below). Another spoke about questioning who has control over the creation of history, and how some groups are “erased from that process” because they don’t have documents and stories recorded in historical archives. Finally, one spoke about how past and present are intertwined and have immediate relevance to current events in the country, for example, connecting past immigration struggles to the present Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) issue.

“I came here at 20, Castro came to power when I was six. So, when I came here, I had a cultural shock because according to history I was supposed to do better in this country. I stayed in Spain for a while, I saw, actually, I almost got blown up like Carrero Blanco during Franco. I was living there when Francisco Franco was there, so I experienced the snaps of the history in Spain. Then I came here and I said okay, I made it to the land of greatness and opportunities. And my first encounter coming from Europe was Fort Apache the Bronx because that’s the only thing that we could afford. So, I was around the ‘70s surround by burnt buildings. So, according to my thoughts it was like a time machine, and I was going back in time because I wanted to go back to Cuba. The history of the United States at that point became completely irreverent. I was there, and at that point—and I’m talking about 1974—whatever they could tell me about the forefathers and all that I just didn’t want to know. I wanted to see how I got out of Fort Apache Bronx... When you get to the United States as a new immigrant, I don’t know for anybody else but for me, history was totally irrelevant. I needed my needs to be met and only then I could accept even what they tell me about the freedom of the forefathers of the country and everything else.”

“Those are stories of trauma, the stories of challenges migrating to a new country, struggling with the language, struggling with work, struggling with status. And we need to acknowledge those histories, those personal histories, those family histories. But we also need to acknowledge our social movements like DACA and the efforts that our communities have made to bring recognition to the realities of our people who live in our state and who made those efforts.”

AWARENESS & PAST ENGAGEMENT WITH HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS

Given the expansiveness of conversation in the focus group, the moderator did not ask participants specifically about their awareness and engagement with history organizations, and none were mentioned offhand without prompting. However, six participants indicated they were familiar with the New Jersey Historical Commission before the focus group meeting, although participants did not expand further on the nature of their awareness or relationship.

INTEREST IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

Several New Brunswick focus group participants acknowledged a need for work supported by NJHC, but they also expressed skepticism about engagement with the opportunities. For example, participants talked about the importance of capacity building in Hispanic and Latino communities as the first step toward helping these communities and organizations take advantage of NJHC and partner opportunities. In particular, participants talked about “technical assistance” that would help individuals and organizations who receive grants not only to fulfill the requirements of the grant, but also to be able to develop a plan that would allow their project to continue be “self-sufficient” after the grant period ends.

Participants discussed two main areas where they saw potential for applying an NJHC grant for Hispanic and Latino communities:

- ◆ **Researching local history:** Many said there needs to be more research about Hispanic and Latino history, locally and at the state level. For example, one suggested tracing the history of different groups (e.g., Mexicans, Cubans, Colombians) in New Brunswick to try to understand why so many Hispanic and Latino groups ended up in this area—“How come Middlesex? How come New Brunswick?” Others said “there are a lot of voices that have been left out over history” and suggested a project to “highlight the contributions of Latinos across the state.”
- ◆ **Creating a cross-cultural network:** A few participants talked about developing training, workshops, or networking opportunities that would help likeminded organizations and individuals together to collaborate, develop cross-cultural programming, and promote their programs and events more broadly.

“I think the Commission can play a really important role in bringing people together. [For example] a showcase presenting the variety of artists that we have in our communities. You know maybe for the central New Jersey area or showcasing different researchers who are working on oral history projects. The ability to call the community and across communities to think about common themes, common issues, that’s an important role that you can play.”

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

Discussion of barriers to participating in grant opportunities arose naturally in conversation throughout the course of the focus group. Barriers to participation fell into three primary categories:

- ◆ **Capacity to apply and fulfill grant requirements:** Several participants talked about the administrative burden of “doing so much with too little,” in terms of individuals’ and organizations’ capacity for fulfilling grant requirements, meeting grant deadlines (such as reporting by the end of a fiscal year), and communicating their progress or results in the way the granting organization is expecting. One suggested building in administrative funding to grants so that someone can support organizations in managing the grant requirements, and the individual or organization can focus on helping the community.
- ◆ **Support network:** A few talked about the importance of having connections with others who can support your work, provide guidance, and connect you to the resources you need to advance your project. They indicated that Hispanics and Latinos may lack the connections they need to strengthen their programs, promote their programs, and reach broader audiences.
- ◆ **Fund restrictions:** A few spoke at length about the challenges of funding restrictions, a couple citing past experiences with other funding opportunities. For instance, one participant said transportation to bring people in to their events is important and wondering if funding covered that expense. Another said grants may cover the costs of events, but if they cannot pay the rent for their building, then it is a moot point. They said finding money to pay rent, administrative costs, and others expenses that may be excluded from grants makes it difficult to sustain organizations despite receiving grant funds.

“We’ve been doing a lot of work on bringing other people from other places to our events. I think our events have been bringing the students, professors, faculty and [soon] we have another event, and people from Europe and Africa are coming to the center. But maybe next month we don’t have a center anymore because we don’t have the money to pay the rent...So besides our work to find money to pay our artists to continue teaching, we have to find money to pay for the rent and administration costs.”

Again, this group spoke with a lot of skepticism about the ability to engage with NJHC through the grant program. Echoing earlier sentiments from another participant, one participant spoke at length—in Spanish that was then translated for the moderator—about personal daily-life-challenges that would prevent them from engaging with NJHC. In the words of the former participant, first and foremost, “I needed my needs to be met.”

BRIDGETON (CUMBERLAND COUNTY) FINDINGS

The Bridgeton focus group was held on Thursday, November 15 at 6:00pm at Hopeloft, a multi-use community space. There were 7 participants in the Bridgeton focus group that ranged in age. The moderator observed that some participants seemed to know each other, and one group of three traveled together from Vineland, although there was less familiarity among participants than evident in Paterson.

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS

After the moderator provided initial welcome statements and explanations, the moderator asked each person to introduce themselves by name and with a little information about themselves.

Most participants are long-time residents of Cumberland County. With the exception of one participant, participants have lived in Cumberland County for 25 years or more. Some described being born and raised in Cumberland County, while others described raising their families here. About one-half of participants live in or near Bridgeton, while the other one-half live in or near Vineland. Notably, participants seemed to quickly bond with each other over shared experiences of their long-time residence in the area, such as around Casa P.R.A.C., a community fixture.

All participants have a strong interest in Hispanic and Latino heritage, and particularly their history in Cumberland County. Participants included individuals who work in a variety of capacities: community leaders, business owner, stay-at-home parent, and firefighter. Most participants expressed an interest in making sure Hispanic and Latino studies are taught in schools and otherwise, and that the history of Hispanic and Latino communities in Cumberland County are recorded and shared.

“I remember, as a little kid, going to Casa P.R.A.C. for everything. It’s funny that 42 years later, I’m at the firehouse, and if somebody is joking around, they’ll be like, ‘You don’t want me to call Casa P.R.A.C.’ [Laughter]. That means that organization was that important to our community... Casa P.R.A.C. has always been, like historically, there’s a lot of history to it. That’s what excited me about us meeting today. I wanted to focus more on the Cumberland County history in the hope that we can share with other people.”

Some identified their specific Hispanic or Latino heritage, while others mentioned it offhand. Similar to participants Paterson, participants often mentioned their Hispanic and Latino identity in passing, which included Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Chilean.

PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY

When discussing their connections to history, participants' responses indicate they most frequently connect to history through their personal family histories and community history, in particular the immigration stories of Hispanics and Latinos that have moved into Bridgeton over time and how the town has changed as a result. For example, one recalled their parents moving to Cumberland County in the 1950s and working on local farms that he would visit on the weekends. He recalled how work opportunities moved from the farms to factories, and then this generation's children started looking outside the local area for other opportunities. Another participant learned about Bridgeton history mainly from being involved in the community over the years, rather than through any formal education. Similarly, many said Hispanic and Latino history in Bridgeton is not recorded anywhere, it just exists in the knowledge of certain community members, which is a challenge to raising broader awareness about the cultural history of the town and the county.

Many participants talked about a lack of Hispanic and Latino history taught in schools, both when they or their children were in school. For example, one explained "When it comes to our culture, [my children] have questions... [my daughter] asked, 'Mom, how come they don't teach us this stuff in school? Why do I have to ask you about stuff?'" Another said that "if I start to think about my education and what my experience was within the New Jersey school system, I don't remember really ever being spoken to about Hispanic heritage." Another built off this observation, saying that including Hispanic and Latino history is even more important now that there is a large population of young Hispanics and Latinos in Bridgeton for whom this information would resonate, including Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Dominicans. Participants talked about the importance of youth understanding Hispanic and Latino history as they develop a "sense of identity" and make decisions about their future aspirations, and as they view school as a primary medium for communicating Hispanic and Latino history. In particular, participants said they would like to see more awareness of the local history of Hispanics and Latinos in Bridgeton, but also highlighting important Hispanic and Latino figures (e.g. Frida Kahlo), and contributions to national history (e.g., the role of Hispanics in the Civil War).

"I grew up in Bridgeton, born and raised here. I'm 28 years old, so I've spent most of my life here. I traveled everywhere, and this is where I like to call home. I'm very happy being a part of this and being able to go over history. I don't know too much about the history, but you know I'm here to try and learn and try to give positive input on the ideas that everybody has because I'm still trying to understand it. I'm still trying to understand how we can actually like you said get Latinos involved in history. I don't know what they're not telling us or what we should know."

AWARENESS AND PAST ENGAGEMENT WITH HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS

Participants mentioned some awareness of history organizations in Cumberland County, New Jersey, or more generally. For example, a few talked about historic sites related to Vineland, such as the Nail House Museum, the Siloam Cemetery, and Roberto Clemente Park, and how these sites are relevant to the local schools' history curriculum. Most were aware of local cultural festivals, like the Puerto Rican festival and Cinco de Mayo. Also, at the state level, one was aware of new museum development projects in Atlantic City through his work with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for a Boxing Hall of Fame and an African-American art museum. More broadly, another said he had heard about an NPR program that helps individuals record oral histories, but he was hopeful something like that could be adopted nationwide, for example, as a state program.

"I mean, you travel to different museums, and we go out of state to go like see interesting things. And I feel like around here, there's not much of that. You know, I can't go to a museum where it has Bridgeton things. I can't think of anything around here."

Overall, discussions about history organizations led to discussions that there are limited opportunities to connect to history in Cumberland County, and specifically Hispanic and Latino history in the county. Conversation circled back to history taught in schools, and the lack of Hispanic and Latino studies. For instance, two younger participants emphasized that Hispanic and Latino studies were not taught in their curriculum (see the excerpt below).

Participant 1: "As far as history, I don't think we learned the national history with Latinos in school. They taught us about Cesar Chavez, about movements, about, I think, Elián González. It's not like we were completely put aside, but I think we should be included. I think the truth should just be told. If there were Latinos in Civil War, then we need to know that. We shouldn't be just told that, okay, it's just Blacks and Whites."

Participant 2: "They had a class called African-American Studies, but they didn't have the Hispanic studies or anything, Hispanic American Studies."

Participant 3: "I feel like we had Latin American clubs where I went to so they're making progress and, right now, I think it's slowly looking up. You know, we had Latin American club for a long time."

Participant 4: "Well, we did, too. We had Spanish club. And the purpose of Spanish club was a float in the Christmas parade and [indecipherable in crosstalk and laughter]. Oh, we didn't go to Puerto Rico. We went to Spain. That was Spanish club."

INTEREST IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

Participants expressed interest in using NJHC and partner organization grant support for several different community-focused initiatives. However, first and foremost, several said they think a grant application and administration capacity building workshop or class would be beneficial to help Hispanic and Latino individuals and community organizations understand the process for applying to and fulfilling grant obligations (see the first quotation). They said this would increase awareness of the grants and also increase confidence in applying for them. A few participants also said there is limited capacity within their organizations to take the time needed to apply for grants, so they are selective about which grants they apply to and history-focused initiatives are not always high priority to human services (see the second quotation)

“If you guys offer some type of class or something, I think it would get people to go there, learn about it, learn the process, how to apply, what they need, all the rules, and I think you’ll get more involvement with the Latino community.”

“Our challenge is operating with the budget we have and the lack of funding that we have in other areas...Do I find a way to feed these people or do I set up a Puerto Rican flag? Which [grant] do you think I’m automatically going to go for?”

Thinking about specific opportunities to pursue through an NJHC grant, participants discussed a few different ideas they thought would be valuable to the community:

- ◆ **School curriculum:** As mentioned above, many participants said it is important to integrate more Hispanic and Latino history into the school curriculum. One said he thought there needed to be “legislation behind it” for such an initiative to make any traction.
- ◆ **Oral history:** Many participants said the local history of Hispanics and Latinos in Bridgeton, Vineland, and Cumberland County “needs to be documented.” Several said there are aging community members who have stories to tell about the early years of the Latino community, and these stories need to be collected before they are lost.
- ◆ **Architectural preservation/monuments:** A few said there are buildings in Bridgeton and Vineland that represent important events or eras and should be preserved or refurbished. One pointed out that for the Hispanic and Latino community, important buildings may be more recent, and thus, not eligible for typical historical recognition. Another suggested that they could get grants to commemorate local Hispanic and Latino figures who have had an impact on the community.
- ◆ **Multi-cultural music event:** A few participants noted the existing Puerto Rican festival could be expanded to a multi-ethnic Hispanic and Latino experience, or they could develop a new event that is focused on sharing a broader spectrum of Hispanic culture and history through music.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

Discussion of barriers to participating in grant opportunities arose naturally in conversation throughout the course of the focus group. Barriers to participation fell into three primary categories:

- ♦ **Lack of awareness of opportunities:** Several participants said a major issue is that many people in the Hispanic and Latino community are not aware of the opportunities available to them through the NJHC or other partner organizations (see the quotation below). They suggested that if community members were more aware of the resources available, they would realize that they could use these opportunities to “do something different or be a part of something bigger.” They suggested that the information needs to be disseminated through channels that are most utilized by the Hispanic and Latino community, such as Spanish radio and newspapers, churches, and the Chamber of Commerce.
- ♦ **Capacity to apply and fulfill grant requirements:** As mentioned previously, a few participants with experience applying to grants said their organizations have limited capacity to seek out, apply for, and fulfill the requirements of grants. As one said, each employee “wears many hats” and so it can be difficult to maintain daily operations, meet community needs for basic resources, and also try to bring in funding for heritage or historic programs.
- ♦ **Skepticism about follow-through:** A few participants noted concerns about whether the opportunities they discussed in the focus group (for example, expanding grant outreach to Hispanic and Latino communities or implementing a curriculum for Hispanic and Latino history in schools) would come to fruition. One was hopeful that “this is the first time I heard of anybody coming further from Trenton to find out what South Jersey wants,” but others worried that “we just talk about it in focus groups and nothing ever happens.”

Note that staff of NJHC’s partners in Cumberland County joined the conversation at this point with suggestions for how to remove barriers for the work. One staff had been actively taking notes and the group as a whole, participants and staff, expressed a desire to continue convening regularly to speak about issues related to the local Hispanic and Latino community.

“I think it’s important to get this information out in Spanish to get the Latinos to know about it because we don’t know about the grants. You know, a lot of information isn’t known about. So, for example, when I opened my own business, I didn’t know there was help or anything like that. I just opened it up. And so that’s what a lot of these Latinos do is they do it on their own because they don’t know that the help is available.”

TOMS RIVER (OCEAN COUNTY) FINDINGS

The Toms River focus group was held on Monday, March 25 at 6:00pm at the Bishop Building. There were 16 participants in the group, and they ranged in age. The moderator observed that all participants seemed to know at least one other person in attendance.

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS

After the moderator provided initial welcome statements and explanations, the moderator asked each person to introduce themselves by name and with a little information about themselves.

Most participants identified their specific heritage early in their introductions.

Participants represent a wide range of Hispanic and Latino nationalities, including Colombian, Dominican, Ecuadorian, Mexican, Peruvian, Puerto Rican, and Salvadorian. Participants' their Hispanic and Latino identity was often prominent in their personal identity and grounded in their family history and heritage.

Participants have varying levels of personal history with Ocean County.

A few participants were born and raised in Ocean County, several are longtime residents who moved to the area with their family as children or young adults, a few moved as adults, and a few moved into Ocean County within the last few years. Several participants have a connection to New York City, either attending college there or living there before they moved to New Jersey.

Several have a strong connection to public services for Hispanics and Latinos.

More specifically, several are connected to the Community Ambassadors organization, which works to build relationships between immigrant communities and municipal services in Ocean County. A few are teachers at a local public high school, and a few are leaders or active members in their religious community. One participant noted that her passion is around connecting and serving the Hispanic and Latino community.

"I was born and raised in Toms River, New Jersey. My parents—my father's Colombian, was born in Colombia, [and he] immigrated here...and my mother is Dominican, came here when she was around 20 years old."

"I'm from Colombia, and I've been here in this country ten years. I've been a priest for six years...I'm new in this county also, only eight months in St. Mary's...That is actually the largest parish of the Diocese of Trenton. We're a bilingual community, so I came over to build up a Hispanic community."

PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY

When asked about their associations with “history,” participants from the Toms River focus group focused on how Hispanic and Latino history is not considered part of the historical narrative of the United States. While this came up in other groups, emphasis was even stronger than the Bridgeton, New Brunswick, and Paterson groups. The high school teachers who were part of this group, but also others who grew up and attended schools in the United States, pointed out that Hispanic and Latino history and heroes are often absent from history curriculum. A couple noted that Hispanic and Latino history is occasionally integrated into a Spanish language or cultural course, but these are electives that not all students would take. One said this is because people “think that America is just the United States...so they don’t think of America as a continent—the biggest part of America is Latino.”

“I didn't know about my own country [of Colombia] until I took heritage classes. And it was only for Spanish speakers, so even if you had to take Spanish in high school, you were only learning grammar, or how to say, Can I go to the bathroom?’ Not about a country's history, and you need to open your mind to that. . . . We have so much American pride, but where is Mexican pride, or Colombian pride? . . . We faced so many hardships and revolutions, and so much history attached to it. And it wasn't really [until] I went to college, where I learned more about it, and again, I had to enroll myself in those classes.”

A few participants said Latino and Hispanic history is also overlooked in New Jersey history, both in the schools and within local history organizations. One recalled visiting local history organizations as an elementary student and realizing Hispanics and Latinos were not part of the local history. Another, who has a personal interest in military history, said she could not find any information about Hispanics and Latinos from Ocean County who had served in the military, despite extensive research efforts. Participants agreed that when Hispanics and Latinos are not properly represented in history, Hispanic and Latino students have fewer positive role models to look up to and they do not have as much pride in or connection to their cultural heritage.

Similar to the New Brunswick focus group, a few participants in the Toms River focus group talked about history as intimately connected to present day and personal identity. For example, one who is a teacher said she tells her students that “history is not necessarily what happened in the past, it’s what’s happening in the present,” and their actions will shape history. Another said “history is now” and includes “all the beautiful and horrible things that happened” in the past and today—making connections between immigration issues affecting Latinos today and Irish and Jewish immigrants of the past. Two participants also talked about how Hispanic and Latino immigrants can feel tension between their Hispanic and Latino and American heritages—“Sometimes I’m too American for my Hispanic friends, and then sometimes I catch myself being too Hispanic for my American friends, so I’m caught.” One said it takes time and mentoring to help Hispanic and Latino students understand that “being Latino is actually a gift in the country, not a curse.”

AWARENESS & PAST ENGAGEMENT WITH HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS

The moderator began the focus group by asking how many participants were familiar with the NJHC. About one-quarter said they were familiar, and one said she had worked for the NJHC in the past. Although the moderator did not ask specifically about awareness of other history organizations, some details emerged from the groups' conversations.

Overall, awareness and engagement with history organizations appears to be limited among participants. A few, particularly those who work in the local high schools, discussed history in the context of public schools and integrating more Hispanic and Latino history into the curriculum. Another participant said he organized a local, family-focused Latino festival for several years in a row focused on music, customs, and cultural heritage, but overall attendance was disappointing. Finally, one shared their perception that local history organizations do not tell the stories of Latinos and Hispanics in New Jersey. Other participants spoke generally about the fact that Hispanic and Latino history is not well-represented in United States history, but did not reference any specific experiences with history organizations.

"I know in fourth grade there was study of New Jersey history exclusively in the history classes, and there's not a lot of discussion about Hispanics, and the Latino impact on New Jersey history, and I think that's a real lack. In fourth grade, I remember going to local community organizations and cultural organizations, and when you're looking at their exhibits and things, you just don't see any Latino was represented, and I think that's a shame because you don't know then how did [Hispanic and Latino] people come [to New Jersey], you know?"

While awareness and engagement with history organizations is limited, conversations indicated participants have a positive perception of Ocean County as a place that is supportive of its Hispanic and Latino community. They suggested that county organizations like the Ocean County Library would present a strong partnership opportunity for historic initiatives, although they were not aware of any such projects currently. As one put it, "We have a lot of history in Ocean County ...all we have to do is just connect the dots, put out the word, and work....If you go to someplace else, they don't want to hear anything about it, anything, and in Ocean County, if you knock on the door, they're willing to listen to your ideas."

INTEREST IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

Participants responded positively to the examples of NJHC grant projects presented by the moderator; however, in the conversations following the presentation of NJHC project examples, some misunderstandings about the NJHC grant process became evident. At least some participants did not seem to understand that the NJHC as an organization does not run most of the programs or research projects, it administers grants so that *others* can carry out work on history projects. For example, one said “I think that’s one thing that should be included if *they’re* going to exhibit some more in the museums...*they* should talk about the Latino heroes in the story” [emphasis added]. In this example, the participant assumed someone else (i.e., the NJHC) would be carrying out a history project, not the participant receiving a grant to complete a project themselves. Despite this misunderstanding, participants were enthusiastic about several different project ideas:

- ◆ **Updating curriculum with Hispanic and Latino history:** Several said they would like to integrate important Hispanic and Latino events and contributions to the history curriculum. Some, who are high school teachers, understandably saw an opportunity for updating high school American history curriculum, and one suggested focusing on fourth grade New Jersey history text books. One high school teacher said, over the past five years, she helped develop a cultural awareness committee in the Toms River school district that is working with teachers to teach about cultural awareness (of Hispanic and Latinos, but also other nationalities and ethnicities) in classrooms—this was an example of a project that could be expanded with an NJHC grant.
- ◆ **Recording oral histories:** A few said collecting oral histories from the Hispanic and Latino communities would be a good project for an NJHC grant. However, one pointed out that Latino communities may need help to see that “the stories are worthy, and that someone wants to hear them, beyond just yourself.” One suggested pairing immigrant families’ oral histories with a “pictorial component” that would help “share the stories in a special way.” Another is currently working on collecting oral histories of individuals from Ocean County who have served in the military, and hoped “the Commission could look into” tracking down more information about this.
- ◆ **Showcasing Hispanic leaders:** One suggested a series of community programs that would feature Hispanic and Latino leaders, such as business owners, educators, and legislators, to talk about their work. For example, one participant was recognized as one of the first Hispanic legislators in the state—participants believed that featuring Hispanic and Latino leaders could show Hispanic and Latino youth how people like them are making history every day.
- ◆ **Ocean County partnership:** One suggested partnering with municipal organizations in Ocean County, such as Parks and Recreation or the library, to develop history programs or events that would be affordable and fun for families with children.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

Participants were asked about what barriers they saw to working with NJHC and using the resources the NJHC offers. As mentioned before, it seemed some participants did not immediately understand that the NJHC provides grants to others to carry out history projects—the NJHC does not manage the projects itself. Aside from this, there were a few other perceived barriers participants discussed:

- ♦ **Awareness of the grant opportunity:** Several said a primary obstacle is making Hispanic and Latino communities aware of the grant opportunities. One suggested advertising the grant opportunity on social media, such as Facebook ads targeted specifically to Hispanic and Latino users. Another said it would be helpful if the NJHC website provided examples of the types of projects that someone could use the grant towards.
- ♦ **Connecting with potential project partners:** A few participants said that the Hispanic and Latino community may not be aware of organizations that would be good partners for a history project, and vice versa, local and municipal organizations may not have strong relationships with the Hispanic and Latino community to start a project together. For example, one said “In schools [for example], not too many people are involved, and not too many people know other people that will reach out to [Hispanic and Latino leaders] and give them an opportunity to speak [about their work].”
- ♦ **Self-doubt:** A few talked about how Hispanic and Latino individuals may not have confidence that their history is important to share with others. One said this was a constant struggle growing up for her, that she struggled to find her voice and share her story even though she spoke English well (see quotation below). Additionally, one participant said some Mexicans are particularly afraid of participating in unfamiliar activities, such as even attending the focus group.

“I was also afraid to talk, and I took English from Kindergarten to 12th grade and even in college, and I was - afraid to talk. I think that even me knowing English, if it was hard for me, I don't want to imagine [what it was like for] other nationalities that come here and don't speak a word of English. . . You're this tiny little ant.

I feel that that's where it hits, what you're saying. **Do they really wanna hear my story? Am I that important?** Because to me, it was really hard. I almost finished—one more semester to finish college and I just couldn't come to college. I had to stop, and even I knew English, I went and paid for ESL classes that I didn't need, and also they charged me a lot of money...because of the insecurity.

And I think that's what happens. **That's what happens with all the Latinos that come here. We're just afraid. We're just afraid, and it takes time to fit in.** It takes time to say, ‘I'm gonna show you. I came to this country. I work and I went to school. And I finished magna cum laude when you were born in here, and you had all the opportunities, and you didn't make it, but I did.’ But it takes time to accept that and say it out loud. And I think that's part of it.”

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

Results from the focus groups highlight the diversity of experiences of Hispanic and Latinos in New Jersey. Below, we have looked across the four groups to summarize similarities and differences across the groups to identify broad trends. Please keep in mind that these are high-level generalities; see the former findings for reporting of results that represent the nuances in each group.

| | PATERSON | NEW BRUNSWICK | BRIDGETON | TOMS RIVER |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| PARTICIPANTS | Second-generation immigrants, long-time residents of Paterson who have a lot of pride in their community | First-generation immigrants, more recent but still long-time residents of New Brunswick who identify strongly with their Hispanic and Latino heritage | Second-generation immigrants, long-time residents of Cumberland County who are interested in documenting their local history | Mix of first- and second-generation immigrants, with various lengths of residence in Ocean County |
| PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY | Deeply engrained in personal and family history | Deeply engrained in personal and family history and concern about losing their culture | Deeply engrained in personal and family history, but also in lack of Hispanic and Latino studies in schools | Deeply engrained in personal and family history, and strong interest in empowering future generations to be proud of their heritage |
| AWARENESS AND PAST ENGAGEMENT WITH HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS | Largely aware of and engaged in history, culture, and art in Paterson | Responses were limited | Largely aware of cultural festivals but acknowledge lack of opportunities in the area | Responses were limited and mainly focused on school trips and programs |
| INTEREST IN NJHC AND PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES | Strong interest in pursuing projects including oral history | Identify need for history work but articulated skepticism about opportunities | Interest in pursuing projects including oral history and school curriculum but some skepticism | Initial confusion about NJHC as a granting organization, but interest in opportunities that empower the community |
| BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN NJHC OPPORTUNITIES | Perceive few barriers other than awareness and taking time to apply | Perceive many barriers including capacity to take on this work and competing needs | Perceive some barriers including lack of awareness and capacity to apply and fulfill grant requirements | Perceive primary barriers are community's awareness of opportunities and self-doubt about the importance of their stories being told |

SUMMARY

In reviewing the former table, history is deeply engrained in participants' personal and family history—this is a similarity across participants of all groups. History as a concept is not something that participants struggled with in terms of interest and engagement. Likewise, all groups recognize and value the need to record and share their local Hispanic and Latino history, although current engagement with history organizations varied among participants and across groups.

The groups diverged, particularly in terms of their interest in personally engaging in history work and particularly in perceived barriers to NJHC opportunities. At one end of the spectrum, participants in Paterson expressed high interest and identified few barriers to pursuing NJHC opportunities. In fact, one participant from this group followed up about a project idea with the moderator, who then connected the participant with NJHC staff. On the other end of the spectrum, participants in New Brunswick were highly skeptical of being able to participate in opportunities of NJHC. The skepticism in New Brunswick did not seem to be connected to lack of interest in history per se, but purely to competing and more urgent pressures, such as living wages, which limit capacity to pursue grants for history or heritage purposes.

Participants in Bridgeton responded similarly to the participants in Paterson regarding low barriers. However, participants in Bridgeton also shared some similar concerns to the participants in New Brunswick about the capacity to apply for and fulfill grant obligations—although the barriers seemed to feel more surmountable to the Bridgeton participants than the New Brunswick participants.

Notably, participants in Toms River highlighted a barrier that had not yet been articulated but seems to be a latent issue across groups—self-doubt that anyone would want to hear their stories. This barrier began to emerge when the moderator recognized some confusion among participants in NJHC's role. Participants spoke about what *NJHC* should do to highlight Hispanic and Latino heritage. The moderator clarified that much of NJHC's work is providing grants to *individuals and organizations for them* to do work highlighting Hispanic and Latino heritage. Participants went on to discuss the need to empower future generations to be proud of their heritage. A few recognized that it takes time for new immigrant groups to feel comfortable telling their stories.

Divergences in the groups' opinions may be related to the fact that groups in Paterson and Bridgeton contained more long-time residents and second-generation immigrants than those in New Brunswick. That is, these participants may not feel some of the same stresses as newer immigrants. Furthermore, there are likely socio-economic factors of each city that resulted in some differences. The differences between groups underscore the great diversity in experiences across the state and emphasize that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate for broadening participation in history across the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are some initial recommendations from RK&A. Additional recommendations can be added and/or refined based on conversations with NJHC:

- ♦ **Increase awareness of NJHC opportunities:** Lack of awareness was the most substantial barrier to broadening participation. To increase awareness across the state, NJHC may need to employ different strategies. Spanish-language translation of grant application and instructions would be beneficial for groups in New Brunswick and Bridgeton. Information about the opportunities should be available in formats participants already use, such as Spanish-language radio and newspapers. Additionally, all groups would benefit from information sessions in each city. While a webinar may be the most economic approach, we encourage commitment to in-person sessions. For instance, the moderators' presence at each focus group was valuable not only in bringing together the local community but also elevating their voices to the state level. For instance, one participant in Bridgeton observed, "This is the first time I heard of anybody coming further south from Trenton to find out what South Jersey wants."
- ♦ **Leverage local partner organizations to assist local communities:** Some local partners offered to serve as a bridge to assist participants in pursuing opportunities, and participants responded positively to these offers. If the NJHC formally wants to leverage local partners, additional support or funding may need to be allocated to these local partner organizations.
- ♦ **Consider funding structures that may help increase participation:** A considerable barrier to individuals in New Brunswick, in particular, are basic economic needs. Potentially there are alternative funding structures that can help the grants truly be more inclusive.
- ♦ **Remember that some may need extra encouragement to feel empowered to tell their stories.** NJHC might need to consider inviting specific individuals to apply for grants to reaffirm to them that their histories are important. Follow up by NJHC with the focus groups participants is one way to provide this encouragement but additional strategies may be needed. As diversity and inclusion consultant Vernā Myers says: "Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance."

APPENDIX

Verbal Consent [5 minutes]

Hello. My name is _____. Thank you all for agreeing to participate in this listening session. It is one of three sessions being held by the New Jersey Historical Commission across the state. The goal of the listening sessions is to help the New Jersey Historical Commission learn how to make itself more available to everyone who lives in the state of New Jersey.

I want to let you know that I do not work for the New Jersey Historical Commission. I work for a company that was hired to gather feedback for them. I'm telling you this because I want you to feel comfortable speaking with me.

I will be audio-recording our conversation so that I have an accurate record of what we discuss tonight, which I will review later and share with the New Jersey Historical Commission. However, your name and contact information will not be requested, recorded, or used in any way. Your participation is completely voluntary and we can stop at any time. Does anyone have questions or concerns?

Introduction & Background [10 minutes]

I want everyone to feel free to speak during the focus group. You do not need to wait to be called on. This should feel like a conversation. Let's start with introductions.

1. **I'd like you each to share your first name and something you want others to know about you—it could be your favorite sport, your job, or anything.**

[Facilitator shares then asks for a volunteer to go next]

2. One of the reasons you were asked to participate today is because you identify with the Hispanic or Latino community. The Commission is aware that this a big umbrella that encompasses people of many different heritages. **Is anyone willing to share how they identify their heritage to others?**

[Probe about family origins, how long they have lived in New Jersey, etc.]

Thank you for sharing. I want to talk more about your heritage as it relates to the history of New Jersey, but first, I want to get to know you more.

Leisure Time Interests [10 minutes]

3. **When you have free time, what kinds of activities do you participate in—alone or with your family?**

[Seek consensus or other examples: Has anyone else done something like that? Anything else?]

4. **Can you recall the last time you participated in a history-related activity in your free time?** This could be anything from visiting a history museum or historic site, reading a book about history, or researching your family history.

[Seek consensus or other examples: Has anyone else done something like that? Anything else?]

Perceptions of History in General [10 minutes]

5. **When you hear the word “history” what comes to mind for you?** What do you associate the word history with? Can you tell me about that?

[We will provide some words printed on paper or projected to get them thinking. Words could include: old, recent, mine, others, school, local, cultural, world, boring, fascinating.]

6. **What are some of your earliest memories studying history?**

[Where did you learn about or study in history? What was that experience like?]

Perceptions of New Jersey History [10 minutes]

7. **When you think about the history of New Jersey, what comes to mind?**

[What people or events do you think are important to New Jersey history?]

8. **Do you consider your story important to New Jersey history? Why or why not?**

Opportunities of NJHC & Barriers to Engagement [45 minutes]

I want to switch gears and talk about the New Jersey Historical Commission.

9. **Was anyone familiar with the Commission before being invited to this group?**
You can raise your hand if you were. [If some know about it, ask what they know]

10. The New Jersey Historical Commission...[show slides about NJHC and its mission]. **I am going to show you some examples of projects of the NJHC, but before I do, do you have any questions about the organization?**

11. **I am going to show you a few examples of projects of the NJHC...** [go through slides of examples and ask the following questions after each example]
 - a. **Do you have any questions about the project/example?**
 - b. **What about this sounds interesting to you?**
 - c. **What about this does not sound interesting to you?**
 - d. **Is this something you might see yourself doing? Why or why not?**
12. **Are there specific reasons you might not see yourself using the resources of NJHC?** And it is okay to say so.
13. Again, the goal of this listening conversation is to help the NJHC learn how to make itself more available to everyone who lives in the state of New Jersey. **Are there things that the NJHC could do to be more available to you?** How so?
14. **Is there anything else you want to share with NJHC?**

Thank you so much for your time. I am going to give you each my contact information. If you have some ideas after today about the work of NJHC, feel free to email, call, or text me. It was a pleasure meeting you all.