

Municipal Best Practices: How Local Governments are Responding to a Growing Hispanic Community

Abraham David Benavides
University of North Texas

This article looks at municipal best practices that have helped the Hispanic community. The author conducted a study whose results show that some cities are taking steps in this area. A number of cities have made extraordinary efforts to assist the transition of new immigrants to their new environment. Cities have built upon the traditions of second and third generation Hispanics to provide meaningful services to all Hispanics. Collaborating with and seeking participation from Hispanics has helped cities customize programs to help new immigrants. The examples of best practices discussed here provide an initial glimpse into how cities are implementing various programs to serve the Hispanic community.

Recent political events concerning both legal and illegal immigration and the growth of the Hispanic population in the United States have caused many to reexamine their concept of the Hispanic community. For the first time in nearly 30 years, the U.S. Senate has not only one, but three Hispanic senators. The Hispanic¹ population is about 42.7 million—currently the largest minority group in the country—and it continues to comprise an ever greater percentage of U.S. cities' populations. Professionally, Hispanics serve in all levels of government and are qualified and capable public servants. These, along with many other examples, are key indicators that the Hispanic community is a vibrant and growing segment of U.S. society.

However, the illegal immigration issue has once again raised a number of questions about the ability of this society to integrate the growing Hispanic population.

¹ In this report, I use Hispanic versus Latino/a. It is a professional and personal preference. These interchangeable terms are used to describe Spanish-surnamed peoples and/or individuals whose ethnic culture primarily descends from North, Central, or South America (including the Caribbean). Hispanics can be of any race. Neither term, however, completely captures the diversity among these peoples. Nevertheless, for me the term Hispanic is all-inclusive.

Over 100 communities across the nation have either passed a city ordinance or voted on a resolution regarding immigration policy or English only initiatives. In most instances, these attempts have led to divided communities, misunderstanding, and court cases. A recent study in Texas has suggested that the Hispanic community is less educated than the average citizen of the state, resulting in lower income and higher levels of poverty. It further stated that other factors, such as decreased consumer expenditures, lower rates of home ownership, higher levels of incarceration, and higher rates of human service and workforce training services usage, are concerns for future planning in the state (Murdock 2002). The report proposed that Texas must introduce social priorities to reduce the differentials between groups in order to secure a better future for itself.

Democratic theory and practice would suggest that reducing ethnic-based socioeconomic differentials is central to the capacity of a political system to respond to the perceived needs and preferences of its citizens. Exactly how responsive governments are to the needs of various groups in a society is a matter of debate. With the Hispanic population increasing in nearly every community in the United States, local governments are learning to adapt to a culturally different and linguistically unique population. Many communities have had to take the initiative and become proactive in their response to the needs of this community by defining problems and proposing solutions (Grover Starling 2005).

Experience has shown that successful governments are responsive to citizens. Thus, most cities make an effort to know their people and respond to their needs. As communities change, governments need to modify their service delivery practices continually to be supportive of the groups within their boundaries. Many of these adjustments can occur in managerial and other practices through either adding to or adjusting existing programs. Local governments have made enormous strides in the quality of service delivery by either importing managerial practices from other disciplines or modeling best practices from similar-sized cities.

Since 1998 the U.S. Conference of Mayors has offered a user-friendly link on its website to various cities' best practices. These practices range from community policing and empowering neighborhoods to programs for at-risk children and improving managerial processes. A second link on the site allows users to view video clips of mayors describing their cities' best practices. The intent of these efforts is to promote ideas or innovations that have been successful in some municipalities so that others can duplicate them and thus be more responsive to their communities.

This article begins with a look at responsiveness within the context of local governments. While bureaucratic and democratic values have a history of conflict, responsiveness to citizens has always been a key value for local governments. At this point, a review of the research on best practices suggests that governments have a tradition of wanting to secure successful policy outcomes by importing best practices from the private and non-profit sectors. This article then proposes criteria for identifying and evaluating best practices through benchmarking as the standard method to implement change. This article uses data from the *Municipal Best Practices for the Hispanic Community Survey* (2005) to show how local governments are responding to the needs of the Hispanic community through improved service delivery. These examples provide an initial glimpse into how cities are implementing various programs at the level of best practices to serve the Hispanic community. Finally, this paper argues that, despite the

complexity of differing cultures, local governments have the capacity to be responsive governments.

Responsiveness

Political responsiveness is most often associated with elected officials, their sensitivity to citizen concerns, and their desire for reelection (Schumpeter 1942; Manza 2002). However, political responsiveness in public administration and local government is more than just how politicians respond to citizens. Responsiveness also has a broader meaning that incorporates all segments and all levels of the bureaucracy (e.g., appointed and non-elected public officials). It also accounts for the delivery of services to the public that “generally denotes the speed and accuracy with which a service provider responds to a request for action or information” (Vigoda 2002, 529).

Scholars have looked at non-elected officials and public managers, and considered the roles that each play in the policymaking processes (Verba and Nie 1972; Hanson 1975, 1978; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 1995; and Ansolabehere, Synder, and Stewart 2001). Many have concluded that these public servants are community builders and enablers of democracy, roles which require that all public officials (whether elected or appointed) anticipate and respond to citizen concerns, uphold fundamental rights, and respond to community needs (Nalbandian, 1999).

Exactly how responsive governments are to the needs of various groups in a society is a matter of debate. Powell (2004), for example, argues that “[d]emocratic responsiveness is what occurs when the democratic process induces the government to form and implement policies that citizens want. When the process induces such policies consistently, we consider democracy to be of higher quality” (91). Glen Hahn Cope (1997) contends that “to respond to citizens, one should perform a service or produce a product that the majority of the citizens want and approve through the political process, since in many cases the citizens are not buying the product voluntarily but are paying for it through taxes (467). John Nalbandian (1999) argues that “in today’s political environment of diverse and conflicting interest, managers must anticipate and attend to claims for equity, representation, and individual rights if they are to succeed as partners to the elected officials and citizens they serve and as leaders of the professional staff they supervise” (188).

Whether we see public servants as conservators (Terry 1990), guardians (Wamsley et al. 1990), stewards (Kass 1990), citizen administrators (Cooper 1991), entrepreneurial managers (Osborne and Gaebler 1992), or benevolent servants (Frederickson and Hart 1985), it is clear that non-elected public officials have an enormous capacity to ensure responsiveness to the needs of those they serve primarily through the services they perform or deliver. At the center of city governance is the desire to acquire knowledge about residents and evaluate local conditions. This process of governing allows managers to be responsive to the need of citizens. Local governments often find themselves attempting to be responsive to customer needs and, in the tradition of good government, look for the most efficient way to deliver services. While much has been written about responsiveness, in all practicality, its value lies in the action-oriented approach that public managers take in assuring that needs are met. For this reason, it is vital to examine how cities respond to their residents and, specifically, how they respond to ethnically diverse groups.

Best Practices

The quest to secure good government through more professional management and administration dates back to the founding of our nation. Although the word “administration” does not appear in the U.S. Constitution, Alexander Hamilton wrote in Federalist 68 that “we may safely pronounce that the true test of good government is its aptitude and tendency to produce a good administration” (414). Rooted in the history of our nation and at the heart of public administration is the desire to provide public services that are not only efficient but also effective, thus producing good administration. The history of the field of public administration is filled with commissions, committees, and reorganization efforts that have sought to improve the workings of government.²

All these efforts have had the intent of securing better management and providing timely and quality services. Naturally, the desire to “produce a good administration” has led to the search for the one best way to do so. During the classical period of public administration, for instance, Taylorism searched for a “best method” to deliver public services. Cogburn and Hays (2004) note that “[o]ne of the most enduring themes of management is the relentless search for a better way of doing things” (434). In all its efforts to identify the “one best way,” however, scientific management, or the classical school, recognized that quicker and improved processes would replace current standards in subsequent years (Taylor 1911). More recent attempts at improving administration have included the National Performance Review (1993-2000), the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (2001-2005), and possible changes to the Federal Emergency Management Organization (2006-2007). The study of best practices is not new to public management, and scholars have tracked its development over the years (Peters and Waterman 1982; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Overman and Boyd 1994; and Katorobo 1998)

Since its founding, the International City Management Association (ICMA) has accumulated best practice information. In 1942, Orin Nolting summarized its then 25-year record, along with responses from a survey aimed at identifying best practices, and compiled it into a few articles and a small reader. The title of this reader, *Management Methods in City Government: A Survey of the Best Administrative Practices in Council Manager Cities*, was based on the belief that “a composite of the best management methods used by a selected group of managers would be of value to all managers and other local government administrators in performing their work more effectively” (2). This 64-year old quote, although unremarkable, is as valid today as it was then. Compiling best practices and assuring their availability to others continues to be an important factor in local governance. Managers continue to look for the “best method,” or at least to improve management practices, in their duty to be responsive.

A best practice, as understood today, is more than comparing service delivery models and practices to identify the best one. According the United States General

² Over the years there have been numerous efforts aimed at improving government. Here is a sample: Keep Commission (1905-1909); President Taft’s Commission on Economy and Efficiency (1910-1913); Joint Committee on Reorganization (1921-1924); President’s Committee on Administrative Management (1936-1937); First Hoover Commission (1947-1949); Second Hoover Commission (1953-1955); various study commissions on administrative reorganization (1953-1968); Ash Council (1969-197); President Carter’s reorganization efforts (1977-1979); and the Grace Commission (1982-1984).

Accounting Office, best management practices “refers to the processes, practices, and systems identified in public and private organizations that performed exceptionally well and are widely recognized as improving an organization’s performance and efficiency in specific areas” (6). Research and practice in public administration, although growing, are currently very hazy as to what constitutes a best practice in the public sector. For instance, there are, on the one hand, many standards and criteria, but, on the other, many best practice awards, given every year, not linked to any standards and criteria. Statistical models such as Monte Carlo simulations, quantile regression, and process modeling have been developed to show how some best practices compare to one another (Wu and Bretschneider 2002; Owen and King 2005). For other practices, criteria are established, and then comparisons are made to identify a best practice.

Specifically, for a program to qualify as a best practice, certain criteria must have been used in justifying the process. Many governments establish criteria that are followed to determine if a government program or process is indeed a best practice. Keehley, Medlin, MacBride, and Longmire (1997) developed criteria for defining best practices based on a variety of sources. The categories include: successful application over time; demonstrates quantifiable gains; innovativeness; recognized positive outcomes (if quantifiable results are limited); repeatable, replicable or relevant to the adopting organization; and generalizable. They note that, even though their criteria have an empirical aspect, “applying the criteria is more of an artistic endeavor” (26). In other words, when examining a program to detect whether it constitutes a best practice, cities should apply these criteria as standards in the evaluation process. As this is done, each organization will develop its own procedures and “artistic” style in arriving at a best practice. Similarly, Bretschneider, Marc-Aurele, and Wu (2005) suggest that “the term ‘best practice’ implies that it is best when compared to any alternative course of action and that it is a practice designed to achieve some deliberate end” (309). They go on to propose three important characteristics associated with best practices: (1) it should be a comparative process; (2) it should be action oriented; and (3) there should be a link between the action and some type of outcome or goal.

Benchmarking is the most common method or tool to facilitate the identification of best practices using established criteria. According to Keehley et al. (1997), “Benchmarking is a process of measuring and comparing to identify ways to improve processes and achieve higher performance. Thus benchmarking is a process—a series of actions, steps, functions or activities that bring about an end or a result” (39). Folz (2004) suggests that benchmarking is used to identify jurisdictions and practices “employed by others which lead to superior performance. In this approach to benchmarking, public officials compare their jurisdiction’s service-performance statistics to those of an appropriate municipal counterpart, with the goal of understanding how they can close the gap between where they are and where they want to be. The idea is to adapt particular policies and practices used by top-performing jurisdictions to realize a comparable level of performance” (209). Therefore, benchmarking can (1) establish how leading cities carry out a particular process (es), (2) evaluate those techniques and compare them to their own cities’, and (3) use this knowledge to improve upon or entirely modify a process (es). The end result is to have processes or procedures in place or a whole new program established that will improve upon the services delivered.

Using best practice techniques is one method for responding to the increasing needs of a growing diverse community. The comparisons drawn, the gaps identified, and

the self-examination involved all encompass a process that in the end will better serve the public. Empirical and qualitative research is lacking in this area and the following study fills the gap in the literature and sheds light on how municipalities can be more responsive. This study shows that there is room for local governments to respond to diverse communities and be efficient and effective in serving them.

Methodology

The tradition of local government service goes beyond ethnicity, national origin, legal status, and other categories. The aim of this article, therefore, is to provide additional information to enable public administrators to be responsive to the needs of Hispanic populations through the use of best practices. This knowledge can help local managers accommodate and improve the lives of children and families, as well as increase service levels of local governments.

The data for this article came from the *Municipal Best Practices for the Hispanic Community Survey* (2005). This survey was commissioned by the International Hispanic Network (IHN) and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to establish current best practices in municipalities that help, assist, and serve the Hispanic community. The current article draws from this study to highlight the best practices found in the 2005 survey. The survey was sent to both Hispanic and non-Hispanic city managers in cities with a Hispanic population of at least 12%, and, for the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas, a Hispanic population of at least a 20%. It was expected that cities located in states with large Hispanic populations would respond favorably to the survey. However, it was noteworthy that almost half the responses came from states with emerging Hispanic populations. Not only are the populations in traditionally Hispanic states increasing, but places like Oregon, Washington, Kansas, Arkansas, North Carolina, Virginia, Nebraska, and Wisconsin, are also seeing an increase in the Hispanic population.³

The responses on best practices used for this paper were part of the larger IHN study.⁴ In the best practices section of the survey, respondents were asked to share information on any programs that targeted Hispanics and exemplified, in their opinion, a best practice. Currently, a number of programs are in place and having a significant impact on the Hispanic community. They range from community resource guides and

³According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the established Hispanic states are Texas, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The new Hispanic states (i.e., states with either 500,000 Hispanics or in which Hispanics comprise the largest minority group) are Florida, Georgia, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, North and South Carolina, and Massachusetts. The emerging Hispanic states are Utah, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Maryland, and Iowa. An emerging Hispanic state had an increase of 200% in the Hispanic population during the 2000 Census.

⁴For the full study report, go to www.internationalhispanicnetwork.org. A summary, "Serving Diverse Communities: Cultural Competency" by Abraham David Benavides and Julie C.T. Hernandez, appeared in the July 2007 issue of ICMA's *Public Management (PM) Magazine*. Another article, "Serving Diverse Communities: Best Practices" by Julie C.T. Hernandez, John Brown, and Christine C. Tien, appeared in the June 2007 issue of the same magazine. Both these articles were based on the original IHN report written by Benavides.

interpretation/ translation services to city council meetings in Spanish, festivals, and full-fledged Hispanic community centers (see table 1).

Table 1 Variety of municipal best practices

<p>Training and Development: Diversity training workshops Spanish classes for employees English as a second language classes</p>	<p>Human Resource Development: Mentorship program for potential managers Internship program Stipends for Spanish speaking employees</p>
<p>Public Relations: Equal Employment Opportunity Employer Business cards in Spanish Utility bill information in Spanish Community resource guide in Spanish Town meeting once a year in Spanish Translation and interpretation services Community relations officer City council meeting in Spanish City manager PR with the Hispanic community</p>	<p>Direct Intervention: After school activities Day Labor site No interest college loan Grants to Hispanic organizations Transition living program for Hispanic women Soccer league Community partnerships Hispanic/Latino community center</p>
<p>Community Development: Summer reading program Ethnic celebrations Hispanic Heritage Month festivals</p>	<p>Community Education Activities: Spanish language citizen's police academy Community block watch meetings Meetings with police chief/commissioner</p>
<p>Crime Related Activities: Appointment of bilingual detective Crime prevention education Crime victim support Spanish language hotline Hispanic community outreach team of officers</p>	<p>Police Community Cooperation Activities: Hispanic community relations officer Toys and clothes for children program Thanksgiving meal program Facilitating interagency cooperation Bilingual interpreters Volunteer community patrols (police academy graduates)</p>
<p>Police Officer Recruitment Activities: Appointment of Hispanic recruitment officer Community meetings that facilitate recruitment</p>	<p>Sources: International Hispanic Network. <i>Municipal Best Practices for the Hispanic Community Survey</i> [September 2005]. Some of the police best practices came from the Police Professionalism Initiative, University of Nebraska at Omaha and the National Latino Peace Officers Association. <i>Police Outreach to the Hispanic/Latino Community: A Survey of Programs and Activities</i> [November 2002].</p>

This self-reporting by cities fulfilled the first step in identifying which programs existed and targeted the Hispanic community. However, to identify the municipal best practices for the Hispanic community, a list of criteria, based on the literature, was established to evaluate each program (Keehley et al. 1997; Bretschneider et al. 2005). The reason for this procedure was threefold. First, using this unbiased method made it possible to identify actual best practices. Second, this system allowed for the elimination of programs (as best practices) that were proposed by the cities themselves. Finally, the criteria were used to evaluate each program on its own merits and avoid comparison between programs. This step was essential because of the variety of programs examined. The best practices criteria used to examine each program were: “successful over a period of time,” “innovative or groundbreaking,” “measurable results,” “consequential,” “replicable,” and “impact on the Hispanic community.” This last criterion, which measured outcomes, was then used against each program submitted in order to ascertain which were truly best practices. The following definitions help clarify each criterion:

Successful over a period of time. It is essential that the best practice have a track record of continuous operation. The norm is usually two to five years. This lifespan establishes a clear trend that a program is working, is accepted, and has institutional support.

Innovative or groundbreaking. The program should be recognized by peers as another tool that the manager can use in the service delivery process. In some cases, the program or practice will be new; in others, it will modify an existing practice, which completely revolutionizes the delivery of service.

Measurable results. Common practice would suggest that a successful program can show measurable results. These can be quantitative or qualitative (i.e., either numbers or success stories of lives changed and/or services delivered can be used).

Consequential. The best practice must be meaningful and have a degree of significance for both the city and the citizen. The emphasis here is on the importance of the program and how far-reaching its effects can be.

Replicable. The program should be repeatable with minor modifications for different jurisdictions. In this manner, more individuals may benefit from the best practice.

Impact on the Hispanic community. For our purposes, the best practice must have a significant impact on the Hispanic community. As noted earlier, there are a number of programs available, but very few have significant consequences for

Hispanics. Therefore the program must in some way be associated with serving Hispanics.

Admittedly, this list is similar to other best practices lists in the literature, and a number of other criteria could be used. Nevertheless, the impact on the Hispanic community solidifies the criteria's validity and makes them appropriate for this study.

The IHN survey identified 43 cities that indicated they had best practices for the Hispanic community. All 43 cities were studied and compared to the six best practices criteria selected for this study. The scoring was conducted by reading each city's information about its best practices, calling and speaking with the director or manager of the program, and rating the best practice on the following scale: 0—has no elements of the best practice criteria; 1—has at least one element of the criteria; 2—has at least two elements of the criteria; and 3—has at least three elements of the best practice criteria. These scores were recorded in a table, and the final best practice scores were tabulated by adding the six individual scores for a grand total. If a city scored between 16-18 points, it was considered to have a best practice. If it scored 14 or 15 points, it was designated as having an emerging best practice. Finally, if a city received only 1-13 points, it was not considered to have a best practice. Table 2 shows the 43 cities and the scoring.

Table 2 Best practice score sheet

Criteria	A	B	C	D	E	F	Best Practice Score
Alexandria VA, Orientation/Education Progm	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Bell Gardens CA, Academic Loan no Interest	3	3	3	2	2	3	16
Brighton CO, Small Business Resource Center	2	3	3	2	3	2	15
Chandler AZ, Hispanic Heritage Month	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Clearwater FL, Operation Apoyo Hispano	2	2	2	3	3	3	15
Dalton GA, Workforce Housing Initiative	2	2	2	3	3	3	15
Douglas AZ, Summer Reading Program	3	3	1	3	3	3	16
Elgin IL, Hispanic Outreach Program	2	3	2	3	3	3	16
Grand Island NE, Multicultural Coalition	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Guadalupe AZ, Cesar Chávez Holiday	3	1	0	2	3	3	12
La Mesa TX, Head Start Program	3	0	1	2	3	2	11
Lake Geneva WI, City Manager Out Reach	2	1	1	2	3	2	11
Lebanon PA, Police Minority Relations	2	1	2	3	3	3	14
Laredo TX, Toll Automation for Bridge	1	2	1	2	0	2	8
Merced CA, Police Community Aid	2	2	2	2	3	3	14
Mesquite NV, Ethnic Celebration Event	3	2	1	3	3	3	15
Newark NJ, La Casa De Don Pedro	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Norcross GA, City Out Reach	0	0	0	2	2	3	7
North Glenn CO, Neighborhood Partnership	0	2	1	0	2	0	5
North Miami FL, Spanish Town Hall Meeting	0	3	0	2	3	1	9
Ossening NY, Day Worker Program	1	2	0	2	3	2	10
Perry IA, Hispanics United for Perry	2	2	2	2	3	3	14
Pontiac MI, Latin Affairs Office	0	2	1	2	3	0	8
Reno NV, Language Skills Program	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Rupert ID, Farm Worker Appreciation Day	2	2	2	2	3	3	14
Salinas CA, Cultivating Peace in Salinas	0	2	0	2	3	1	8
Salt Lake City UT, Resource Guide	2	2	1	3	3	3	14
San Antonio TX, Earned Income Program	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
San Jose CA, Leadership and Supervision	2	2	3	3	3	1	14
Santa Barbara CA, City Council in Spanish	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Santa Clarita CA, Hispanic Center	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Seattle WA, Latino Advisory Council/Liaison	3	2	3	3	3	3	17
Seattle WA, Neighborhood Matching Funds	0	2	1	2	3	2	10
Seattle WA, Fiesta de Los Muertos	2	2	1	3	3	3	14
Shelbyville TN, El Centro Latino	1	2	1	3	3	3	13
Sterges MI, Hispanic Soccer League	1	3	1	3	3	3	14
Taft TX, Pride of Taft	2	2	1	2	3	1	11
Tempe AZ, Tempe Tardeada	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Tucson, AZ, Casa Amparo	3	2	2	2	3	3	15
Tucson, AZ, Court Interpreters	3	1	2	2	3	3	14
Tucson, AZ, Sin Violencia Center	3	1	2	2	3	3	14
Woodburn OR, Community Relations Officer	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Weslaco TX, Department Mentor Program	2	2	2	3	3	3	15

Criteria
 A. Successful Over Time
 B. Innovative
 C. Measurable
 D. Consequential
 E. Replicable
 F. Impact on Hispanic Community

Best Practice Rating Scale:
 0-Has no elements of criteria
 1-Has at least 1 element of criteria
 2-Has at least 2 elements of criteria
 3-Has at least 3 elements of criteria

Best Practice Score:
 16-18 – Best Practice
 14-15 – Emerging Best Practice
 01-13 – Not a Best Practice

The reliability of these scores is as valid as can be expected for best practices studies (GAO 1995; Wu and Jiaotong 2002; Johnson and King 2005). Applying criteria across different types of programs can be risky. However, these different programs' common element was their desire to serve the Hispanic community. Therefore, the risk in dismissing a valid program (because it was different) was reduced because all programs had a unifying theme. Other studies that compare best practices lack this collective factor, making the comparisons like apples to oranges. Here, however, the practices are all apples, just different types of apples. Comparability, therefore, is appropriate.

Findings

Of the 43 programs offered as best practices by cities, 30% (or 13) did not qualify as a best practice. A major problem was that the programs could not be measured

in terms of their impact on the Hispanic community. Another issue was that the programs were either too new or operated sporadically, causing them to have a low score in being successful over a period of time. For instance, a town hall meeting is held in North Miami, Florida twice a year. One meeting is in Spanish and the other in Creole. Although the city makes an effort, this meeting hardly constitutes a best practice, as it is difficult to measure any continual impact from a yearly meeting of this nature. This lack of frequent contact in an official capacity with the growing Hispanic community could even be construed, at best, as ignoring a segment of the population and, at worst, as neglect. Another program that was put forward as a best practice yet failed to meet the criterion was the Toll Automation and Weight in Motion System submitted by the city of Laredo, Texas. The bridge system is completely automated and has facilitated both commercial and residential traffic across a crucial international border. Although commendable, the bridge does not conform to the definition of a best practice. Specifically, it would be difficult to replicate bridges in cities with growing Hispanic populations if the natural geographic terrain did not require bridges. In other words, the Laredo bridge system is unique to border cities with rivers and not replicable to other growing Hispanic populations in the U.S.

The city of Pontiac, Michigan submitted a Latin Affairs Office program and the city of Salinas, California proposed a program called Cultivating Peace in Salinas. However, both programs closed and were no longer in operation. In many instances, cities create programs to address specific needs, but the programs have funding restrictions or are closed for various reasons. Although commendable during their existence for addressing specific issues, these programs do not constitute best practices because they have not been successful for a period of time. Finally, the city of La Mesa, Texas suggested the Head Start program as their best practice because of the many Hispanic children in their community enrolled in it. This is an excellent program that has existed for many years. However, there was no indication given by the city that it conducted any innovative practice or cooperated in any special way with the school district to warrant a best practice designation. In other words, the city saw an existing successful program that helped the Hispanic community and assumed that because it was within its city boundaries it could submit this program as a best practice. Unfortunately, there was no evidence that the city cooperated with the Head Start program to tailor the program to the needs of its Hispanic residents. Thus, for this analysis, the program was not considered a best practice.

Of the cities' programs, 37% (or 16) were classified as emerging best practices. These programs met many of the criteria, but fell short in one or two of the categories. In time, with minor adjustments, these programs too can prove to be best practices. For example, the city of Tucson, Arizona has a well-developed court interpreter program. The services for Spanish speaking individuals include interpreters in the courtroom, translation of documents submitted to the court, and, when necessary, translation of documents sent out by the court. The program is replicable, has been successful over a period of time, and its impact on the Hispanic community is evident. However, the program failed to score full marks for how it measures success and for its inability to be innovative. Future changes in how the program tracks its accomplishments and uses technology to advance translation processes will move it into the best practice category. Another program that scored high marks for innovativeness was Stergis, Michigan's Hispanic Soccer League. The city organized 26 adult Spanish male soccer teams with the

purpose of disseminating information to the Hispanic community through team representatives. The program is replicable, consequential, and has an impact on the Hispanic community. However, the program fell short of being a best practice because it is relatively new and there were no performance measures in place that would indicate the city's message is being delivered. If the program continues and measures are implemented to assure that the program is meeting its goals, then it can emerge as a best practice. A third example of a city program that did not quite meet the standard of a best practice was the Leadership and Supervision Academy of San Jose, California. The academy focuses on leadership and management training and their application to the San Jose environment. This program for city employees prepares middle managers for the rigors of upper management. Although the program is measurable and replicable, it is not very innovative and has a minimal impact on the Hispanic community. The city gave no indication that specific training was given to these managers about dealing with the differences between the Hispanic community and the dominant culture. Employing specific modules or sessions on understanding the complexities in the Hispanic and other communities would help elevate this training program to a best practice.

Finally, 33% (or 14) programs actually met all the criteria to define them as genuine best practices. These programs not only had a significant impact on the Hispanic community but also met the other criteria: successful over a period of time, innovative or groundbreaking, measurable results, consequential, and replicable. The municipal best practices included below are examples of what some cities are doing to deliver quality services to the Hispanic community. Those that appear to be successful have made the attempt to reach out and tailor programs to Hispanics, with significant input from the community. The common theme in all of these services is that the cities took the time to find out what was needed and included the community in their service delivery designs. In other words, participation from the Hispanic community was found to be key in delivering a service that could ultimately qualify as a best practice. These best practices demonstrate the desire of local government to be responsive to the Hispanic community and give great details about the extent to which cities are willing to go to accommodate a growing section of their community.

Hispanic Orientation and Education Program, Alexandria, Virginia

The primary components of Alexandria's Hispanic Orientation and Education Program (HOEP) are its free English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and its promotion of gradual and non-threatening acculturation assistance to Hispanics. Workshops and orientations are also offered in citizenship, community resources, employment, health, domestic violence, taxes, and other appropriate areas. The goals of the program are to facilitate the movement of Alexandria's Hispanic residents into the American mainstream through sensitive acculturation and the promotion of self-sufficiency. One of the elements that has made the program successful is its volunteer development. The participation of volunteers has been extremely important for the implementation of the ESL/Orientation component. Every year an average of 25 to 35 volunteers are successfully trained to understand and recognize the cultural, social, and economic differences of their students and customers. The participation of the volunteers in HOEP has a dual purpose: one is to serve as an ESL teacher and role model; the other

is for the volunteers themselves to acquire firsthand knowledge and understanding of the Hispanic community.

The workshops and orientations are organized around subjects of common interest and generally feature guest speakers and follow-up discussions. Strong emphasis is given to crime prevention, court issues, HIV-AIDS, general health, city services information, basic financial information, the law, and other important issues. In 2006 alone, over 400 immigrants have attended the workshops and orientations. Members of the Hispanic community who are legal permanent residents and have held that status for a period of five or more years are eligible to apply for United States citizenship. HOEP's citizenship programs and classes are designed to educate participants about American history, civics, and federal, state and local politics. The volunteer teachers also emphasize the importance of students participating more actively in their local civic associations. HOEP also has an active information and referral agenda. This segment of the program links Hispanics and private and nonprofit agencies with each other, thus operating as a clearinghouse. Topics of daily inquiries and responses include social services, legal services, housing, Department of Motor Vehicles, immigration and naturalization, employment, court-related issues, ESL, mental health, etc.

In the past 10 years, HOEP has striven to build bridges between ethnic groups. It has successfully formed coalitions with grassroots organizations and established credibility within both the Hispanic and the professional communities to maximize services, minimize racial conflict, and stimulate dialogue between Hispanics and the larger community. By incorporating free ESL instruction with its program offerings, HOEP has been able to introduce and connect resident Hispanics to services and resources provided by the City of Alexandria and private and non-profit organizations.

Community Relations Officer, Woodburn, Oregon

Woodburn, Oregon is a significantly smaller city than Alexandria, Virginia; however, it is in as much of a position to respond to the needs of the Hispanic community as any large metropolitan area would be. The city created a community relations officer position to assist with translation and to act as an ombudsman for the Hispanic community. The position's duties include interpreting at public meetings and in city hall, translating official documents and informational materials, providing resource referral, developing public information for a variety of media, and editing a quarterly newsletter. The position also offers limited staff support for events organized by businesses in the downtown core, and for the larger Hispanic community. The goals of the program are to increase the Hispanic community's access to city services and its involvement in civic activities, improve communication with the Spanish speaking community, and foster cross-cultural understanding.

Several elements have made the program successful. One is the leadership of the city council and administration. The city strongly supports the community relations officer and program goals, and has given the officer broad discretion in selecting projects and adjusting duties. Second, the position has increased the city's credibility and built strong bridges with first and second generation Hispanics, businesses, the media, and the Mexican Consulate. Through this position, the city has immensely improved relationships with the Hispanic community and encouraged partnerships with Hispanic businesses in the downtown core. This has led to credible, well-supported business watch programs that are generating positive crime reduction results. Other benefits include a better-

informed Hispanic population and well-written educational materials on everything from driving and personal safety to animal licensing.

Community Center, Santa Clarita, California

The Newhall Community Center in Santa Clarita, California provides Hispanic youth and families with a wide range of activities, including tutoring, boxing and other sports, ballet folklórico, ESL, art, and adult education classes. The goals of the program are to serve, support and respond to the needs of the Hispanic community and to provide recreational and educational opportunities for low-income and high-risk youth. Some of the elements that have made the program successful are its responsiveness to the needs of the Hispanic community, and strong city support, including funding and excellent leadership. Attendance has more than doubled since 1998, and programs have increased over 60%. Crime and gang involvement in surrounding neighborhoods have diminished. Families feel more empowered to get involved with the city. Young people have improved their grades, obtained jobs, and become role models to other youth. The Hispanic community also participated in the development and design of their new community center building, which opened in late 2005.

City Councils Meetings in Spanish, Santa Barbara, California

Santa Barbara, California offers residents real-time Spanish translations of its city council meetings. Additionally, both English and Spanish versions are rebroadcast on the city's television channel. Earphones are made available at city hall prior to and during the council meetings so that individuals whose first language is Spanish can plug in and listen to the simultaneous translation of the proceedings. The goal of the program is to allow those whose first language is Spanish the same access to government as English-speaking residents. The fact that translation is offered automatically and sensitively, affording everyone access with dignity, has been a major factor in the program's success. The whole community in general and the Hispanic community in particular, have responded with approval. Satisfaction is especially high among English-speaking residents who wish to celebrate their Hispanic history and roots. Notably, during Santa Barbara's first 50 years as a city, all business was conducted in Spanish.

Latino Advisory Council/Police Community Liaison, Seattle, Washington

Seattle organized the Latino Advisory Council specifically to bridge the communication gap between the city's police department and the Hispanic community. The advisory council discusses concerns, issues, recommendations, needs, perspectives, and insights from the Hispanic community. This information goes directly to the police department and has had an impact on the city's community policing model. The city also appointed a Latino liaison officer, a fulltime position with one assigned staff person. The liaison reports directly to a deputy chief. The Latino Advisory Council and the Latino liaison officer work together to promote awareness, partnerships, community involvement, and training, which further the program's main goal of building relationships between the Seattle Police and the Hispanic community. These efforts are instrumental in showing the need for social service programs that focus on gang prevention, intervention, and recovery services. The mayor's office has awarded grants for services in highly populated Hispanic communities, and a number of partnerships

have been created as a result. For instance, in the community of South Park, a boxing gym and a Police Activities League (PAL) were initiated. The partnership was able to provide the gym with over \$20,000 worth of boxing equipment, it began soccer and basketball events with local community centers, and enabled PAL to increase its interaction between Hispanic youth and police officers. In another partnership, Allstate Insurance, the Latino Advisory Committee, and the Latino liaison officer were able to underwrite a workshop called "Life Choices and the Law." This event had approximately 130 youth in attendance, almost 75% of which were Hispanic. An international exchange program with the Peruvian National Police was also started. This has created a better understanding of cultural issues and provided training in specialized units such as Anti-Terrorism, Anti-Drug, and Education. The Seattle Police Department also has a special police liaison assigned to the 37 consulates in the state of Washington. The liaison assists with any possible issues related to crime or the arrival of dignitaries into the Seattle area. The liaison also works closely with the Mexican and Peruvian consulates since there is a high population of immigrants from these countries.

The Seattle Police Department has noticed that, since the inception of these initiatives, many programs citywide are getting a better response from the community and a sense of trust is being created. Statistically, a reduction in Hispanic youth related crime has been reported since the programs began in 2003. Another excellent tool that the Seattle police department has at its disposal is a training video that examines issues of concern involving experiences and perceptions between Hispanics and law enforcement. This video was created through these partnerships and is available for both residents and police officers in English and Spanish.

Chandler's Hispanic Heritage Months Events, Chandler, Arizona

The city of Chandler, Arizona has produced a series of events to commemorate National Hispanic Heritage Month. The events include a poster contest, a mariachi festival, ballet folclórico dance workshops, a Hispanic heritage photo exhibit, a Garibaldi night, a Hispanic book fair, an educational forum, and a college night at the local community college. The goal of the program is to create awareness in the community of the many contributions that Hispanics make to the city. The elements that have made the celebration successful are the many partnerships that have been established in the city. The planning committee consists of city staff members, students and faculty from the community college, as well as members of the Hispanic community and the Chandler Coalition for Civil and Human Rights. The committee also partners with numerous local businesses and the media to offset the costs of producing all the events, thus making them free to the public.

The program has enjoyed incredible success, attracting thousands of people throughout the month to the various events. In addition, Chandler has received tremendously positive coverage in both the English and Spanish media. Some city general funds have been used for these events, but the majority of the funding comes from corporate sponsors. Clearly, the key to successful cultural events like Hispanic Heritage Month is the involvement of the community at large in their planning.

Diversity Language Skill Program, Reno, Nevada

Since 2003, Reno, Nevada has provided instruction in practical Spanish language skills to any interested city employee. By tapping the multi-lingual skills of

current city employees who have been certified at one of three levels of Spanish proficiency, the city provides these employees as co-facilitators to assist in Spanish language instruction. Under the guidance of International Professional Development Services (IPDS), a local business whose primary emphasis is Spanish language skills training and development, and Truckee Meadows Community College, city employees are able to hone their Spanish skills, regardless of their level of proficiency. Employees participate in these bi-weekly workshops and their skills are matched with one of three groups: beginning, intermediate, or advanced. Only those employees who have been certified as having advanced proficiency in Spanish are able to do translation work for written materials. The goal of the program is to equip employees at all levels with language skills to serve the city's diverse community.

The success of the program can be attributed to the commitment of participating employees to expanding the city's ability to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking residents. They view this ability as one of the many components that make up excellence in customer service. Employees willing to learn, certified employees willing to give of their time to promote learning, and commitment and support from the city's management team all combine to make the program work. As of this writing, 18 city employees had been certified by the local community college, four of them at the advanced level. Of the 18, eight employees served as co-facilitators of the language program. The funding for the program, both its conversational Spanish classes and the certification fees, comes from the city's training and development budget.

Conclusion

All seven of the programs highlighted above obviously met the criteria established to be designated a best practice (along with the seven others not highlighted here). Overall, these findings are significant because they help create a benchmark for programs that are being developed for and targeted to the nation's largest and fastest growing minority group. The criteria provided here offer a tool for local governments to gauge their programs against an established model of programs that have already been measured. Not all programs intended to help Hispanics are best practices and it appears that only about one-third of the programs in the survey were truly successful. The criteria established here were successful in weeding out programs that classified themselves as best practices yet failed to meet conventional standards.

Governments have a tradition of wanting to improve policy outcomes by changing, modifying, or creating new programs. Customarily, they have done this by searching for best practices. Sometimes this has been just a matter of selecting a better practice (Behn 2004), but, recently, the emphasis has been on innovation and creating new programs that address the needs of the population. In general, the results of this best practice study show that some cities are taking steps to serve their communities. Several have made extraordinary efforts to implement services to assist the transition of new immigrants. Some of them have used benchmarking, a tool certain scholars believe can assist in the identification of processes that will enhance the delivery of public services (Keehley et al. 1997; Coe 1999; and Ammons 2001) This civic engagement of diverse communities has included the traditions of second and third generation Hispanics and has provided meaningful services to all Hispanics. In other words, seeking participation from

collaborating with Hispanics that have been in the United States for years has helped cities customize programs that help both new immigrants and longtime residents.

As American cities continue to diversify, public services must be responsive and reflect the changing needs of these communities. It is important to remember that “a best practice is not a fixed way of doing things but something that changes over time and from one organization to another” (Keehley et al. 1997, 22). What is working well today as a best practice is not necessarily the best practice of tomorrow. The examples of best practices examined here provide an initial glimpse into how cities are implementing various programs to serve the Hispanic community. Despite the complexity of differing cultures, local governments have the capacity to be responsive governments.

Abraham David Benavides, an assistant professor in the Department of Public Administration at the University of North Texas, holds a Ph.D. from Cleveland State University, a masters degree from Brigham Young University, and a bachelors degree from George Washington University. His research interests include local government, state and local government interactions, human resources, diversity issues, best practices for minority communities, minority public administrators, human service issues, and local government in Mexico. He has published in the *Journal of State and Local Government Review*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education* and the *Journal of Emergency Management*. He serves as president of the North Texas chapter of the American Society for Public Administration, and as a civil service commissioner for the City of Denton. He can be contacted at benavides@unt.edu.

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