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# INVESTING IN LATINX TALENT

LEADING ADVANCEMENT OF THE LATINX LABOR FORCE

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2019, the Latino Professionals Association of Greater Madison (LPA) conducted a two-year analysis of its members and the community on their workplace experiences. We developed a framework to help businesses, public institutions, and policymakers maximize the Latinx workforce.

The majority (61%) of respondents indicated that they have lived in the greater Madison area for more than ten years. In addition to the survey, we held focus groups to gather anecdotal data about the Latinx experience in the workplace.

Three specific themes emerged from the results:

- **Career advancement** for the Latinx community remains elusive, and many see a lack of fairness in promotional opportunities.
- **Workplace culture** falls short of truly valuing the Latinx experience, skills, and knowledge, impacting our members' well-being.
- **Educational attainment** remains a concern and a barrier to our community's future employability.



More recently, we invited our Latinx community to explore these themes in small virtual groups and to share what would improve the Latinx experience in the workplace:

1. We asked participants to share their educational experiences: the challenges, successes, barriers, pathways, and the skills needed to navigate the U.S. education system.
2. We discussed equitable access for workplace advancement opportunities: what lifts and hinders our opportunities to lead.
3. We explored the key factors of supportive workplace culture: celebrating diversity and inclusion and recognizing the value that Latinx employees bring to their workplace.

These conversations took place throughout the pandemic, where we also learned that the impact of COVID-19 on the advancement of the Latinx labor force has been devastating. According to the Pew Research Center, the unemployment rate of U.S. born Latinx (15.3%) was higher than that of foreign-born Latinx (13.5%). In April 2020, the rates for both groups peaked at more than 18%.

As we amalgamated all of this, we found the following recommendations and strategies to advance the Latinx workforce:

- Redesign workplace policy with a lens towards equity
- Harness the power of diversity through inclusive leadership
- Build a culture of intentional sponsorship and mentorship
- Grow industry-backed, structured pathways to the careers of the future

## A CALL TO ACTION

We call on industry experts, policymakers, and, most importantly, our capable and resourceful community to rally behind a collective agenda that secures long-term economic recovery and mobility for Latinx workers and the entire state of Wisconsin.

# CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Career advancement for the Latinx community remains elusive and many see lack of fairness in promotional opportunities.

Survey and focus group participants indicated that Latinx workers are often hired as an attempt to diversify workplaces but face barriers to advancement beyond the entry-level. While 74% of respondents reported having worked in Madison for at least five years, and over 68% have earned at least a bachelor's degree, only 34.5% held a position higher than individual contributor or first-level manager. Just 45% of survey participants reported that their organization provides development opportunities for diverse employees, and only 37% believe performance and compensation decisions are fair. Participants said gratitude for their employment while also expressing discontent for lack of opportunities to advance to supervisory and leadership roles. In the words of a participant, "they (employers) need to realize that we are talented and qualified and not just here to fill jobs."

Women, women of color, in particular, are significantly less likely than men to

attain first-level (first supervisor role) promotions. This also applies to women early on in their careers who receive less encouragement and support from managers and senior leaders in advancing their careers than do their male peers.

*"I worry that there are not enough folks that are advocating for people of color to advance in either their companies or their organizations or to different roles and that our Latinx people don't have the skills to advocate for themselves."*



# 45%

of participants reported that their organization provides development opportunities for diverse employees

# 37%

believe performance and compensation decisions are fair

The 2017 Women in the Workplace research showed that women who receive advice from managers and senior leaders on career advancement are more likely to be promoted.

It is important to recognize intersectionality in our Latina members' career advancement experience, which is more acute due to the pandemic. According to Lean In's 2020 Women In the Workplace study, COVID-19 has turned employees' lives, and workplaces upside down and is threatening to erase gains made by women in the workplace. According to the Pew Research Center, the pandemic is a financial and health crisis, and Latinx women have experienced a steeper decline in

employment (-21%) than other women and men. Furthermore, a report released by the Network of Executive Women reports senior-level Latina talent is heading for corporate America's exits at an alarming rate.

Our participants report that despite individual efforts in advancing their education, knowledge, and skills, they are paid less than others. In part, a new study released by Georgetown University refutes the notion that African American and Latinx minorities can improve their socioeconomic standing just by going to college. According to the study, between 1991 and 2016, Black and Latinx Americans increased their likelihood of obtaining and maintaining a good job. However, their white peers

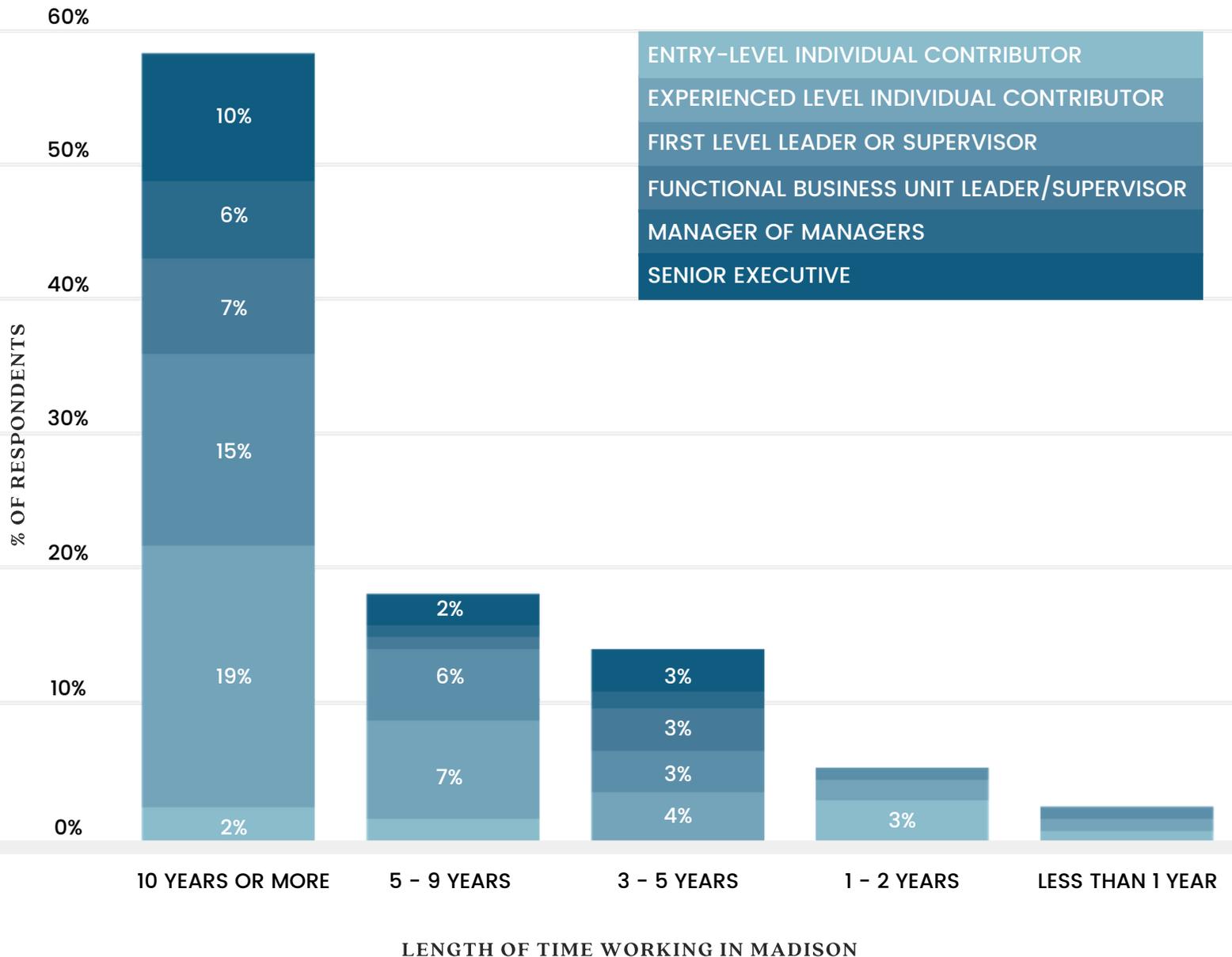
still disproportionately held better positions compared to their overall employment.

Latinxs have a long road ahead for economic equity. The generational wealth gap between Latinx and whites is exacerbated by workplace biases keeping Latinx in entry-level jobs despite their qualifications and aspirations to advance up the chain of command. [According to a study from the Center for Talent Innovation](#), the sponsorship divide is holding back the advancement of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) into leadership roles. The majority of whom are male and white, don't adequately sponsor or mentor people who don't look like them.

Despite the barriers and challenges, our survey participants show optimism in the gains Latinx have made. They emphasized the importance of representation at the leadership level and recognized that representation increases access for the community to have the influence needed to create systemic changes. Participants also expressed a sense of responsibility to teach and empower others to enter and navigate the system for a continuous course of growth and progress for our Latinx community.



## CAREER LEVEL BY TIME IN MADISON, WI



Latinx employees are often hired as part of diversity attempts but face barriers to advancement beyond the entry-level. While 74% of respondents report having worked in Madison for more than five years and over 68% report earning a Bachelor's degree or higher, only 34.5% hold a position higher than individual contributors or first-level managers.

## WORK ENVIRONMENT

Challenges in the workplace include lack of professional networks, culture shock, tokenism, and expectations of assimilation.

Participants shared challenges with a lack of professional networks and experiencing culture shock in the workplace, which is heightened in Madison. In this place, a bachelor's degree does not set job seekers apart. Most Latinx consider themselves to be outsiders in the workplace and indicate that they are primarily recognized as a member of a "minority." Most believe the overall community climate for BIPOC has been improving but falls significantly short of completely embracing diversity or providing equitable experiences. Less than half of respondents (45%) state

their workplaces offer concrete actions to practice equity, such as diversity, inclusion, and equity training to managers and employees. Participants shared that they developed skills in code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more dimensions of identity and often have to appear "white presenting" to fit in the workplace. Participants expressed struggling to be their full selves at work, impacting their confidence to succeed at work. They reported that this discrimination, in the form of expected assimilation, affects their wellbeing.

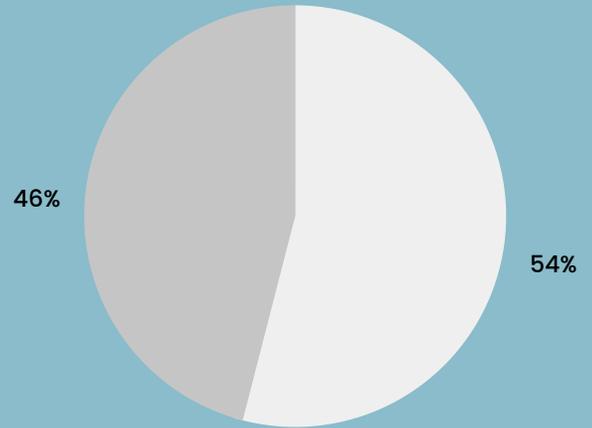


*"...the imposter syndrome in regards to trying to fit in, and being okay, and almost leaving part of your culture in the back just so you can function as an individual. "*

Participants agreed that support systems or networks, such as non-profit, community organizations, mentors, and leadership training, were essential to ease the process of adapting, navigating, and understanding the many challenges an immigrant, bicultural, and bilingual individual faces in the current system. They also strongly agreed that the workplace needs to change to become more equitable.

Survey and focus group participants are encouraged by progress toward valuing diversity and equity and believe this is an asset of the Greater Madison region. Further, given the small size of the Madison community, they see opportunities for individual and organizational action to make a real difference in our community members' lives.

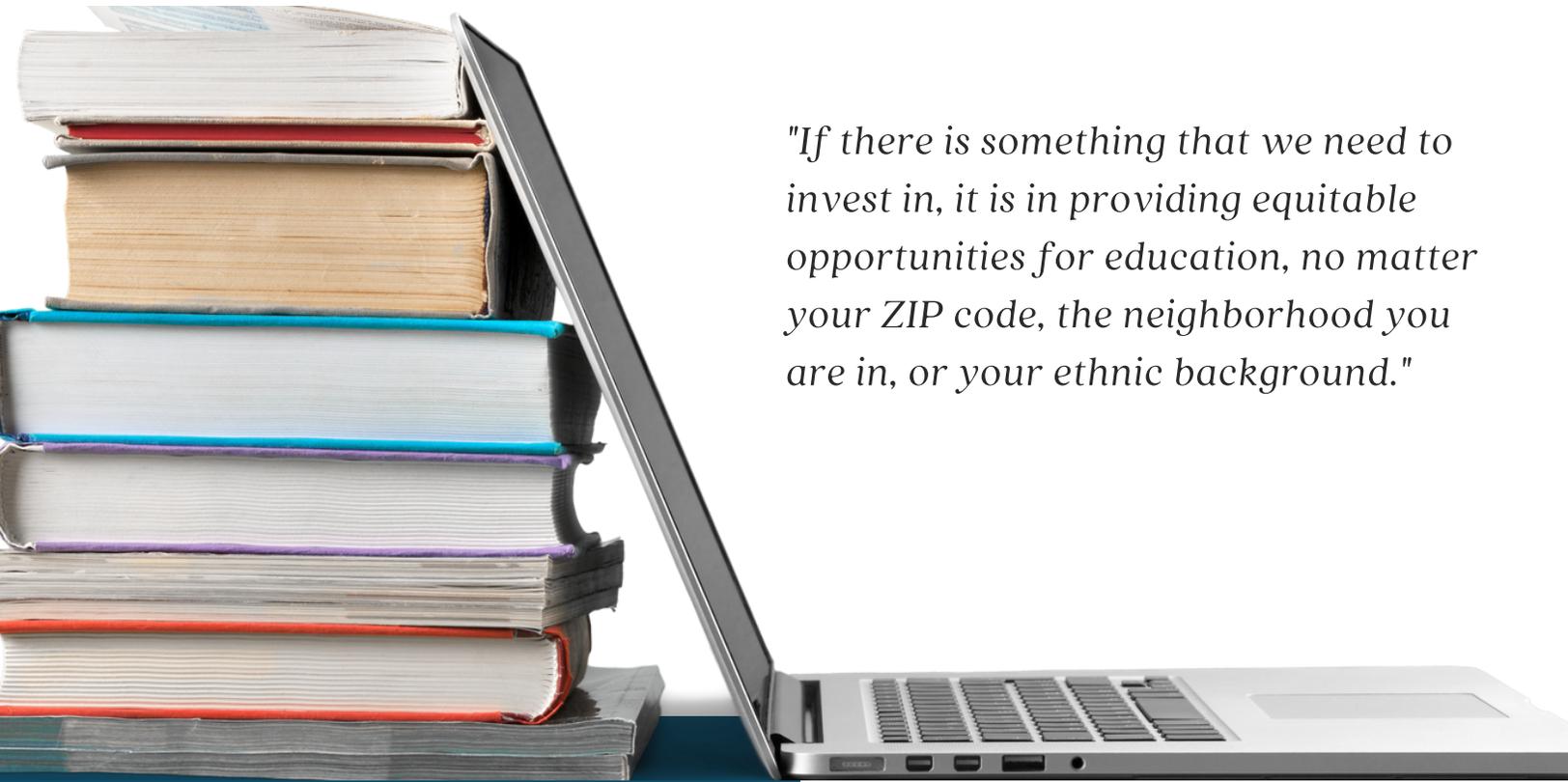
*“If an employer is not willing to accept me for my true me, I'm not going to give it my best. I really want to be able to work my best.”*



**46%**

of employees witnessed diversity and inclusion training for anyone in the organization





*"If there is something that we need to invest in, it is in providing equitable opportunities for education, no matter your ZIP code, the neighborhood you are in, or your ethnic background."*

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Between 2010 and 2018, Latinx accounted for 55% of Wisconsin's overall population growth. Throughout this time, Latinx have shown tremendous potential for growing the state and local economies. However, despite such unprecedented growth, it remains true that the Latinx community has persistently lagged behind their counterparts in educational attainment. From 2016–2017, Latinx in the U.S. labor force were, on average, less educated than white, Black, and Asian Americans.

Nationally, 39% of degrees earned by Latinx in 2018 were at the associate level, compared to 25% earned by the general population. In our study, only 11% of respondents reported an associate degree as their highest education level. The survey respondents represent a highly educated group, with 94% having earned a professional or associate degree, and over 68% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. This data aligns with Dane County residents' educational attainment backgrounds, who have the highest rate of bachelor's degrees or higher per capita in Wisconsin. Data indicates that 50.7% of residents over age 25 have at least a bachelor's degree.

55%

*Wisconsin's overall Latinx  
population growth*

20.5%

*Latinx K-12 students in Madison in  
the 2015-16 academic year*

According to The Postsecondary National Policy Institute, nationally, 61% of Latinx students are first-generation college students. More than half of the respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher reported being first-generation college graduates in our study. Through our community conversations, we learned of the challenges and difficulties Latinxs face in pursuing four-year degrees in our state institutions. They often have to learn to navigate systems through trial and error. As of 2014, among Latinx ages 25 to 29, just 15% of Latinx have a bachelor's degree or higher. By comparison, among the same age group, about 41% of whites have a bachelor's degree or higher (as do 22% of Blacks and 63% of Asians). A college degree is a requirement for many professional career entry-level positions.

According to The Peterson Institute For International Economics, a critical factor in determining the long-term economic prospects for a country, a community, or even an individual is how much time and effort is devoted to education and improving human capital. Among our survey respondents, 64% earn above the Wisconsin Hispanic and Latino median income, which stands at \$47,232 per year. Only respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher reported annual salaries over \$100,000. The 25 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs)

with the largest Latino economies saw a 123% increase in Latinx households with incomes over \$100,000. The economic prosperity of metropolitan areas is tied directly to Latinx economic mobility.

GDP GROWTH  
**28%**  
 FASTER



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## HARNESSING THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY

According to the Scientific American Journal, being around people who are different from us makes us more creative, diligent, and hard-working. Further, Katherine W Philips states that the key to understanding the positive influence of diversity is through the concept of informational diversity. When people are brought together to solve problems in groups, they bring different information, opinions, and perspectives. However, bringing diversity together is not easy, and it requires organizational transformation for diverse teams to be effective. According to Korn Ferry's inclusive leader report, shifting the whole organization towards inclusion requires a commitment to developing leadership traits and skills of flexibility, adaptability, openness, and authenticity. Inclusive leaders bring everyone to the table so that you can listen, learn, and then lead to a place not entirely visible today. A diverse team's success is dependent on inclusive leadership.



Developing an inclusive culture starts with raising an organizational leader's capacity to be inclusive. To do this, companies can pursue the following steps.

- Embed these leadership competencies in formal expectations:
  - Openness and awareness
  - Effective advocacy for diversity
  - Trusting, open teams
  - Leveraging difference for greater insight
  - Driving results
- Accelerate leaders' skill-building through executive coaching, especially for team leaders who previously have not had the experience of leading diverse teams.
- Hold leaders accountable by embedding inclusive leadership competencies as part of the performance review process.

As demonstrated by research, the richness of ideas and solutions that arise from diverse teams often materializes into economic gains. Companies with diverse leadership are 36% more profitable than their peers.

*“I think it puts undue pressure on people of color basically to be the ones code-switching and demonstrating more cultural flexibility and adaptability in the workplace.”*

# EQUITABLE POLICIES

Focus group participants expanded upon the lack of alignment between policy and practice for hiring and advancement opportunities in the workplace, bringing up concerns about the 'check a box' mentality. Participants shared concerns of tokenism or the practice of making only a perfunctory effort to be inclusive to members of minority groups to give the appearance of racial or sexual equality within a workforce. Nearly 40% of respondents feel neutral or disagree that people have equal opportunity to advance their careers into supervisory and executive roles regardless of race/ethnicity, color, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, veteran status, religious beliefs, disability or socio-economic status.

Many participants expressed concern over how Latinx are perceived as a homogenous group without considering the complexities and diversity within the community. During our conversations, three specific policies significantly impacted our community.

- Education affordability, including in-state tuition for undocumented residents
- Drivers license for undocumented workers
- Immigration reform, including a permanent solution for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients

*"When I think of supporting our families, I think of just structural change, how much policy affects us, our families, and communities."*



As it relates to workforce policies and practices, we recommend the following:

- Develop a more accurate understanding of why racial and gender inequities exist in supervisory and executive roles and how they affect the Latinx community
- Translate learning into action: All aspects of business operations should be analyzed through the lens of the experience of BIPOC employee (including product design and distribution, marketing and advertising practices, and hiring and personnel policies)

Ensuring that policies and practices are equitable will allow Latinxs to succeed to the best of their capacity while feeling supported and encouraged by their workplace. Instead, we see Latinx succeeding despite the barriers and challenges faced trying to navigate systems stacked against their progress and dismiss their value, values, and culture; while also sacrificing their mental health and well-being.



## SPONSORSHIP AND MENTORSHIP

Feedback from our report shows the degree to which mentors have impacted the participants. Mentors don't necessarily have to be in the same line of work as their mentees. Participants shared how these differences in work culture allow for broader personal and professional growth and have allowed mentees access to a more extensive network to explore career options. Participants also reflected on how having a mentor of color allowed for better work experience when maneuvering a work culture. BIPOC mentors can relate to the struggles and challenges while also offering strategies to overcome barriers.

Organizations need to intentionally prepare their leaders to be sponsors of people who are different from them, or they will fall into traps of the mini-me sponsoring bias — our tendency to sponsor people who remind us of ourselves.

Organizations will be more successful at diversifying their leadership team by effectively using the succession planning process to create diverse leadership opportunities intentionally. Succession planning starts with organizational leaders and executives mentoring and

sponsoring high-potential BIPOC employees. According to the Harvard Business Review, managers skilled at developing all high-potential talent are more successful in their managerial roles and recognized for this approach.

Essential considerations in designing and implementing successful mentoring and sponsoring programs:

- Identify a framework that would help make successful matches.
- Be clear on expected periodic connections between mentors and mentees.
- Give guidance on the topics and goals of mentoring to reduce the impact of biases, which often results in unequal treatment of mentees based on their identities.
- Measure and monitor the success of mentoring and sponsoring.

Organizations like the Latino Professionals Association of Greater Madison have experienced success in developing and implementing a comprehensive mentoring program for Latinx professionals seeking mid-level management roles. Between 2016 and 2019, the LevelUp program recruited 24 participants to participate in a five-month program with a curriculum focused on strength-based confidence building, professional branding, networking, and leadership skills.

Currently, 20% have moved on to mid-level or advancement roles within their own or other organizations.



*"I don't think it's ever too late to mentor or too young to start to mentor. Having mentors and sponsors, pushing you to success, and helping open those doors and make sure that you even know what doors exist to open at times. Having other people reaching out to you and saying there are other people you should connect with and recommending things to try. I think that's huge."*

## INDUSTRY BACKED STRUCTURED PATHWAYS

Today, many employers seek to increase diversity within their organizations but often find scarcity in the talent pool. Latinx seek opportunities for advancement, middle-management positions, and wage increases. Our participants report that getting a chance to use the full extent of their knowledge and skills is often a frustrating and challenging process. We believe that companies can alleviate their talent scarcity through industry-backed structured pathways while creating life-changing opportunities for Latinx.

According to The Changing U.S. Workforce: The Growing Hispanic Demographic and the Workplace report, creative and collaborative structured pathways help Latinx demystify navigating the workplace. Additionally, industry-backed structured pathways can also alleviate some of the barriers such as the high cost of postsecondary education, misalignment between skill sets and industry needs, allowing participants to access a different career pathway at different points in their career, and adding value to their previous experience. The report also notes that "pathway participants significantly exceed college and national benchmarks in college transition, retention, academic success, completion, and transfer, with measured



*"I am a professionally trained physician from the Dominican Republic. When I finished my degree over there and then came to the U.S., I was very frustrated because I couldn't understand the system. I couldn't navigate the system to validate my license, and I thought I invested all these years in preparing myself professionally."*

outcomes for Latinx students equivalent or better than the overall population."

Recently, the Bell Policy Center released a report highlighting some of the core components that make industry-wide structured pathways successful:

- Engaging employer partners and having an intentional focus on including industry voice in all phases of the design process
- Convening innovative education and workforce partners to reconfigure existing programs to build pathways that meet employer expectations, students' needs, and institutions' policy priorities.
- Developing strong partnerships that include two-year and four-year postsecondary education institutions

Locally, structured industry pathways have demonstrated to be successful and have historically implemented some or all of the core components listed by the Bell Policy Center. Some of these pathways include the Caminos Career Pathways at Centro Hispano of Dane County and the YWeb Academy at the YWCA. For example, the Caminos Finance Career Pathway at Centro Hispano of Dane County has successfully placed over 100 professionals in the finance sector since 2016. At least 50% of those professionals have since

experienced career advancement from tellers to universal bankers, accountants, lending specialists, among other positions.

According to the Bell Policy Center, "without paying attention to equity of access and existing barriers, policymakers and educational institutions run the risk of creating a workforce that is unable to meet the demands of the day." Consequently, we ask that institutions and organizations formalize programs that help first-generation Latinx college students and professionals with a career history outside of the U.S. to successfully navigate the educational and workforce systems and bridge the gap between talent and opportunity.

We encourage organizations to consider partnering in meaningful and intentional ways with existing Latinx lead initiatives. Further, the Latino Professionals Association members are eager to share hard-earned lessons with upcoming generations. Our members can serve as points of access to support the successful retention of Latinx talent in their respective industries by building a strong network of professionals and expanding mentoring opportunities.

# CONCLUSION

***“We are opening the doors we want to open and not giving up.”***

We believe focusing on harnessing diversity, equitable workplace policies, mentoring and sponsoring, and industry-supported pathways will build long-lasting progress to advance the Latinx workforce.

In lending their voices, Madison's Latinx professionals have provided us with a wealth of experience to draw from that serves as a beacon of possibility for what Latinx can become: an integral and contributing force in society. In pursuing that aspiration, the Latino Professionals Association seeks to live up to our mission of cultivating a community that inspires, develops, and empowers Latinx professionals to pursue success.



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