2. Understanding the Hispanic Culture

Know the Proper Terminology

Five Common Cultural Traits

Compelling Reasons for Scouting’s Success in the Hispanic Community
Know the Proper Terminology
While “Hispanic” is a politically correct term, unit-serving executives should be aware of their own Hispanic community’s preference. For example, “Latino” is preferred over Hispanic in most Southern California cities like Los Angeles because of the diversity of the Spanish-speaking people who live there. However, Latino may be viewed negatively in other parts of the country. Sensitivity is the rule when determining your local Hispanic community’s preference.

Five Common Cultural Traits
Most Hispanic Americans share five common cultural traits: strong cultural identity, the Spanish language, emphasis on family, religious fervor, and respect for elders.

Strong Cultural Identity
Unlike the immigrants who came to the United States in the early 1900s, the vast majority of Hispanic Americans strongly identify with their ethnic background. They cling tightly to their rich Hispanic culture. Their commitment to their families, religion, and heritage is unparalleled.

Most Hispanic Americans have a strong work ethic and loyalty to their employers. They have a keen desire to make it on their own. In addition, their willingness to help others who are less fortunate and to improve their community may explain their passionate views on life.

Hispanics faithfully observe the religious and ethnic holidays deemed important in their country of origin. For example, Cinco de Mayo commemorates the victory of a decisive battle against the French army by Mexican soldiers on May 5, 1862, and is widely celebrated by Mexican Americans. Likewise, Cuban Americans commemorate Liberation Day, which occurred on January 1, 1899. This day marks the end of Spanish rule in Cuba. Commonwealth Day, which is celebrated by Puerto Ricans, commemorates proclamation of Puerto Rico’s constitution on July 25, 1952.

Various rite-of-passage ceremonies like a Hispanic girl’s Quinceñera are celebrated in most Hispanic communities. When a Hispanic girl turns 15, her parents celebrate her passage into womanhood with a special church service and reception attended by close friends and relatives. In doing so, parents symbolically prepare their daughter for her eventual wedding day.

Unit-serving executives should note that September is Hispanic American Heritage month. It celebrates the contributions of Hispanic Americans like Cesar Chavez—this country’s most influential Hispanic labor leader—and their profound effect on American life today.

Spanish Language
How important is Spanish to Hispanic Americans?

- Ninety percent of Hispanic Americans in this country learn to speak Spanish as their primary language. Compare this to only 10 percent of Hispanic Americans who learn to speak English first as infants.
- Seventy-nine percent of Hispanics are most comfortable speaking Spanish at home.
- In terms of media usage, 70 percent of Hispanic adults prefer watching Spanish-language television and listening to Spanish-language radio.

Language does play a big role, but do not rely on language alone. It is a mistake to assume that because a person can speak the language he or she understand the culture. The Latino market is consumers who demand and necessitate a professional Scouter or volunteer who can understand and relate to this specific culture.

“Hispanic” is actually a term that leads to disagreements. There are those who do and do not prefer it as their cultural umbrella. Some prefer the term “Latino.” Hispanic is derived from the term Hispana, which is the Spanish language term for the country’s cultural diaspora. Many Latinos denounce the term Hispanic and refuse to use it because it symbolizes colonization. As a result of mixing natives, Europeans and Africans, many Latinos view themselves today as a combination of all three.
In fact, the Membership Recruitment Team suggests the uses of the term Hispanic/Latino American, and a large number of the boomer and mature generations prefer this term.

Most Hispanic youth, on the other hand, are more receptive to English-language media. Also, not surprisingly, U.S.-born second- and third-generation Hispanic Americans are more likely than foreign-born Hispanic Americans to prefer English-language messages.

Recognizing the importance of Spanish in serving Hispanic communities throughout the United States, the BSA National Council produced close to 100 colorful, Spanish-language training booklets, videos, posters, and promotional fliers. These items, available through the BSA's National Distribution Center, target Hispanic parents in an effort to educate them about Scouting and its methods. Some of these materials are now being revised to keep up with the most current Scout requirement changes.

Unit-serving executives should be sensitive to opportunities where Spanish is appropriate. Recognizing that only a small percentage of BSA professionals are fluent in Spanish, one should make a special effort to identify volunteers who are bilingual. This will be very important when organizing new units in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods.

**Emphasis on Family**

Traditionally, Hispanic American families tend to be patriarchal; that is, the father is clearly the head of the household. The family unit tends to be large and often includes other relatives. Hispanics view their families as great treasures that must be protected and never abandoned. The family is responsible for instilling and maintaining one’s cultural traditions and identity, and is a central force in the lives of Hispanic Americans.

The old saying “One can never go back home” is not necessarily true for most first-generation Hispanics. Subconsciously, they long to return home to their relatives. This might explain why most Hispanics tend to have their primary residence near loved ones.

Hispanic Americans cherish their family’s name, so much so that it’s not unusual for first-generation Hispanics to formally use both their father’s surname and mother’s maiden name simultaneously. Attention should be given to the correct pronunciation and spelling of Hispanic surnames. The Membership Recruitment resource *How Do You Pronounce Hispanic Names?* can be very helpful.

Also, keep in mind that there is a growing number of middle-class and upper-class Hispanic Americans whose families tend to be smaller than the average Hispanic family. These second- and third-generation Hispanic Americans are well-educated, speak English most of the time, are career-oriented, mobile, and feel comfortable with their independent American lifestyle. Yet, they remain steadfastly proud of their Hispanic culture.

In the Hispanic community, a unit-serving executive should always communicate the concept of Scouting as a family program. Building strong families through Scouting serves as a powerful message when trying to organize a new Cub Scout pack in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. Encourage Scouting opportunities where the entire family can participate, such as Scoutoramas, pack meetings, and blue and gold banquets.

**Religious Fervor**

Most Hispanic Americans view their religious faith as a life-sustaining force. Major life decisions are prayerfully approached with God’s favor and blessings. While approximately 85 percent of Hispanic Americans consider themselves Roman Catholic, there is a growing number joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other Judeo-Christian religions.

For the vast majority of Hispanic Americans, their Catholic priest or church pastor is not only their spiritual leader but also an important spokesperson when it comes to Hispanic issues and concerns. The pastor’s supportive comments can have strong impact when introducing new programs such as Scouting to a Hispanic congregation. Imagine also the impact a religious leader can have in helping to identify and recruit enthusiastic Hispanic American parents to serve in key Scouting leadership positions.
The best-selling tool Scouting has that specifically addresses the concerns of Hispanic Americans for their child’s religious upbringing is the religious emblems program. Unit-serving executives should discuss the various religious recognitions when organizing a new unit in a predominantly Hispanic church. Have the appropriate BSA religious emblems materials on hand. These are available through the Community Alliances Team. The colorful A Scout Is Reverent poster spotlights all the religious emblems and serves as an excellent selling tool in the Hispanic community.

Respect for Elders
Hispanic Americans have great admiration and respect for their elders. Younger family members constantly seek the advice of elder relatives because of their wisdom and understanding of life’s many challenges. Hispanic elders also pass on the language and culture to the next generation and often share in the responsibilities of rearing younger family members. Most elders feel they have a vested interest in helping youth develop into good, productive citizens. Some even take an active role in volunteering their time to organizations like the Boy Scouts of America.

Senior Hispanic American community leaders can be strong allies in helping professional Scouters organize new units in Hispanic neighborhoods. Their presence may be valuable when recruiting new unit leaders and making phone calls to remind parents of an upcoming meeting. Some Hispanic elders may even be ideal unit commissioners for newly organized, predominantly Hispanic units.

Compelling Reasons for Scouting’s Success in the Hispanic Community
Delivering the Scouting program to a group of people whose brothers, fathers, uncles, and grandfathers most likely have not had a Scouting experience as youths can be challenging. Also, the preconceived notion held by most first-generation Hispanic Americans—that Scouting in their native country is for wealthy families only—can make a unit-serving executive’s task much more challenging. Instead of focusing on barriers, consider the following compelling reasons for successful Scouting experiences in the Hispanic community.

Consistency of the Scout Oath and Scout Law with Hispanic Culture
The Boy Scouts of America is fortunate to have a mission statement, Scout Oath, and Scout Law consistent with the values and principles cherished by most Hispanic Americans. The concept of “helping others at all times” reinforces the Hispanic cultural belief of caring and showing respect toward others, especially those who are less fortunate. “Duty to God and country” is another Scouting ideal consistent with the qualities that Hispanic Americans expect of their young people: God-fearing, patriotic, drug-free and gang-free, responsible young citizens.

While all 12 points of the Scout Law reinforce ideals cherished by Hispanic people, trustworthiness, obedience, and reverence are worthy of attention. Hispanic American youth are taught early in life that being trustworthy, dependable, and responsible are virtues of a good family provider. Also, being obedient toward one’s elders is synonymous with showing respect for them. This trait is common to most Hispanic Americans.

The 12th point, “A Scout is reverent,” may have the most impact in the Hispanic community. Early on, Hispanic Americans learn that everyone is a child of God, and that one’s religion is a means of communicating directly with Him. When speaking about a program that enhances a Hispanic child’s religious education, this grabs the most undivided attention of a Hispanic audience.

Scout Oath or Promise
On my honor I will do my best
to do my duty to God and my country
and to obey the Scout law;
to help other people at all times;
to keep myself physically strong,
mentally awake, and morally straight.
Scout Law
A Scout is
Trustworthy
Loyal
Helpful
Friendly
Courteous
Kind
Obedient
Cheerful
Thrifty
Brave
Clean
Reverent

Educational Emphasis of Scouting
Hispanic American community leaders rank education for their youth as a high priority. They welcome opportunities that promote educating the whole child. For Hispanic families, the quality of their child’s education translates into someday having a satisfying career or profession.

When addressing a Hispanic audience, a youth-serving executive should explain to parents how Scouting’s rank advancement program encourages and helps promote good student learning habits. One could also share that various merit badges like Engineering, Medicine, and Law may spark a child’s curiosity into pursuing a career in such fields.

Scouting’s Family-Centered Programs
If a Hispanic person were asked, “What matters most to you?” the answer will most likely be “my family.” Programs that foster good relationships with family members and promote building strong families also have a Hispanic audience’s undivided attention. For this reason, Cub Scouting has gained wide popularity in Hispanic communities. Youth-serving executives would be wise to promote activities and events that emphasize family and encourage family participation. Also, when organizing a new unit, stress the rank advancements that stimulate healthy family life, such as the Making My Family Special achievement in Tiger Cubs, the Family Member activity badge in Cub Scouting, and the Family Life merit badge in Boy Scouting.