

Relocation of Centro Hispano and the Low-Income Tax Clinic

Karla Hernandez and Genesis Garcia

Utah Valley University

Dr. Leandra Hernandez and Dr. Stevie Munz

## **Introduction**

Centro Hispano is a non-profit organization that was first formed in the early 2000s at Utah Valley University (once known as Utah Valley State College). Centro Hispano was formed to help the Hispanic community with educational and cultural opportunities such as basic life skills, and job skills, and it even has resources about staying healthy (Centro Hispano, 2021). Later in 2004, the Centro Hispano was relocated to a building part of United Way in Utah County and Community Action Services. Here, they started their first class to teach English and later expanded their services. Recognized, Centro Hispano officially named a non-profit in 2007, which allowed employees to take on interns to help out the organization (Centro Hispano, 2021). Over the years, Centro Hispano has provided services for their community like health promotion, citizen preparation, workforce development, immigration services, and the Low-Income tax clinic. The services here provide considerable help to the community as well as help to organize, support and attend any events for the community. In fact, Centro Hispano helps support and plan a huge event in Provo for all to come called, The Provo Festival Latinoamericano. The festival allows various people from all around to experience rhythms, food, dances, and more, from all different cultures around the world. Provo Festival Latinoamerico is one of the largest in the area and deserves recognition because of its huge success over the years. Centro Hispano has provided services to assist their community but also offers support to small businesses around the area to celebrate their community members. The relationship between Centro Hispano and the community developed and has grown throughout the years. In the aspect of serving the community, Centro Hispano and the community has worked well beyond its borders.

Throughout the years, Centro Hispano has worked to gain trust, build meaningful relationships, and help the community and its members. Centro Hispano has been able to hire a

strong group of valuable employees who work with the organization. Having a strong system of employees has allowed them to keep and grow its members. Maintaining employees who are dedicated and have the ability to provide them exceptional services that benefit the citizens' lives. The relationship between the Centro Hispano and its members is a connection to be admired and appreciated.

### **Project Overview**

Used among the locals, is the Low-income Tax Clinic (LITC). The Low-income tax clinic receives funding from the IRS, yet it does not mean that the clinic or employees are affiliated with the IRS. Every year, the Centro Hispano gets funding to allow them to give back to their community. This funding is not consistent and as of late, there has been recent news of a possible relocation for LITC moving them to Salt Lake County. It leaves huge concern to the members and the community. The relocation of the LITC would disrupt the connections, stability, and trust built in Centro Hispano. This could bring up possible barriers for its members like division and abandonment being some of the first concerns. In this study, we gather information to help find how the move would affect its members, the community, and the Centro Hispano. To do this, we interviewed members of the Low-Income tax clinic to find patterns, suggestions, thoughts, and feelings about what would arise and happen in their personal life. As important as it is to get insight from Centro Hispano members, it is equally as important to see the impact Centro Hispano has created on the employees who provide the services. Being able to ask specific questions about the change and its effects on its people is something to be addressed and taken into consideration. In return, we can figure out what to do to have our community and state in constant progression.

The project will be within the barriers of Utah County and Salt Lake County and will interview 10 people of all different ages and backgrounds. Within the interviews are people who have used the service for 1 up to 7 years. We conducted these interviews within a 3-month timeframe and have kept track of the patterns in concerns and suggestions, along with any additional comments. With several possibilities for the low-income tax clinic, we want to be able to present the impact this has on Centro Hispano, its current members, and the future of the organization. We also want to be able to present the best ideas for its future and make sure that the help that is being serviced will continue with better changes and better benefits for all involved.

The Low-Income Tax clinic serves people who fall under the low-income and special case categories. As a group, we wanted to get more of an understanding of how the LITC works, what individuals can access them, and what the service does for the community. The purpose of the LITC is to educate and serve members on their tax rights (Centro Hispano, 2021). For our research, we met with individuals within the organization to get some insight into the requirements, which helped us get more of an understanding of the participants and their cases. A requirement mentioned was that if members had different and/or difficult problems going on with their taxes, they can access this service. Throughout the interviews, we did notice most of the first-time interactions happened because of a problem with their taxes. Most problems were due to an error done by another provider whom they hired. If there is no huge problem in a person's case and they want to use the LITC services, then those individuals can get attended if concluded to be under the low-income category. However, if the following year people who do not have a huge need due to a problem and make more than a certain amount a year, they would likely be redirected to someone else. Another reason people use the service is because some

individuals are undocumented and know little to nothing about taxes or how they should be done. The Centro Hispano's prime purpose for opening was to help undocumented people become familiar with the system, and feel safe enough to learn more about the country to later become legally part of it and self-sufficient contributing citizens. This place was built to be a safe haven for those in need of a place to find comfort, education, and security. Later, the Centro Hispano magnificently became a much more venerated place. The Centro Hispano now not only serves the undocumented but serves all in the community. The Centro Hispano is a safe place for all to get the well-deserved help they need.

The services that are provided at the Low-income tax clinic are free, which is so beneficial for members who are unable to pay someone to help them fill out their taxes. A participant in one of the interviews mentioned some important information to highlight. Participant 1 said, "Some people have to decide whether to buy groceries, pay bills, or pay someone to help them with their taxes. Some places take advantage of the authority they hold and charge high rates to file taxes". Participant 1 mentioned that there are individuals who get here from another country and do not know about filing taxes so they get mistreated and overcharged. She mentions how it is unfair to take advantage of people who lack knowledge and we now know that Centro Hispano does not take advantage. As a non-profit organization wanting to give back and help its community, overcharging is not even an option. Sadly, there is certain funding not accepted to help the population who are undocumented, and having this in mind motivated the Centro Hispano to keep working hard. There is not much education provided to help individuals who get to this country on how to file taxes. Having a service like this in Centro Hispano has helped participants who are in similar situations and have eliminated the fear of being turned away because they are not documented. Being new to the country does not deny

them help through this service. The Centro Hispano, all of our participants have said, has been a blessing for them and their loved ones.

Out of the participants for these interviews, there was a diverse background collected for each individual. We were able to interview people that are undocumented, low-income, college educated, special case, disabled, Spanish speaking, parents, old, young, part-time, and full-time workers. All of these people were uniquely directed to the Centro Hispano in different ways, on different occasions, and for different reasons. One thing connecting them all is they needed help. Since we have such a diverse group of people using the low-income tax clinic, this means we have various reasons for how the move would affect each person and their family. Some people are concerned about having access to the clinic in regard to transportation, language, and internet accessibility. Some were concerned with trust and losing the relationships they have built with the workers at the clinic. There is fear that with the move to Salt Lake City. They are afraid the people would turn into a number instead of being recognized and treated as the person they are. “We would have to become a number in the Kog, in the machine.” (Participant 2). For all of the members who use the LITC, the relationship they built over time with the employees is cherished and important. These people have expressed to us that the clinic changed their lives for the better. The members not only receive free help on their taxes every year but they have been able to build valuable and meaningful friendships to last a lifetime.

When doing the interviews the key point bringing them back to Centro Hispano, as mentioned earlier, has been trust. The human quality, as Participant 1 mentioned, feels genuine from everyone who works there. There is sincere care for their members and their well-being. The interviewees mentioned they come back to the Centro Hispano because the team remembers who they are, and their situation and always feel safe and welcomed. Because of the intimate

feel, members who use the service cherish the closeness. Centro Hispanos employees also have an immense knowledge of taxes and know what they are doing. The director of the LITC, Sherry Almquist, has provided a place people wanted to come back to. Sherry created a judgment-free environment where people are not afraid to ask for help. Not only do the members get their taxes done but they are also getting educated by the employees which makes the members feel gratitude for the education. Participant 2 states, “This gave me the confidence to learn more about taxes and start to fix my own problems. My growth has expanded probably 3 times in the last 6 years with this knowledge”. Getting their taxes done correctly and trusting that there are no mistakes, is a great feeling but the friendship is what draws the members back in. It is a great example of the quote, “If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime”. The community members not only feel like they can reach out to Centro Hispano and get their questions answered correctly but they know that they will also be thoroughly informed. As beneficial as it is getting taxes done, participant 3 mentioned that she was able to feel comfortable talking to Sherry about the next steps in her business. In this participant's situation, there was a feeling of uncertainty due to the different legal paperwork that they had recently obtained; however, their nerves were eased with the help of Centro Hispano's LITC employees. Having hospitality, security, and safety knowing their questions will be answered without judgment is an environment that Centro Hispano strives for. The feeling of comfort and safety makes participants have a mix of emotions about the potential move. They are ecstatic for the well-deserved growth in the community, but fear the changes will only benefit the state and not its people.

Centro Hispano's intention is to give back to the community yet, because of the uncertainty, members feel concerned about the potential change in the system and new authority

of power. During the interviews, we asked participants how they felt about the possible changes regarding the decision of the potential relocation. We have discovered that most of the members are against the move or feel that the move is unnecessary. Salt Lake County is the most populated county in Utah with 1,186,257 people counted in 2021 (U.S. Census Bureau Estimates by County, 2022). Next in line is Utah County with 702,434 people counted in 2021. This is a difference of a little over half a million. Participant 1, who lives in Salt Lake County, mentioned, "I think having the clinic in Provo where people have easy access to public transportation is an excellent location... I know that right now I can go to Provo and I'll get back without much traffic." This participant highlights how she hates the amount of time wasted in Salt Lake City's traffic due to the overcrowding in the area. Being able to go Utah County from Salt Lake County in a fraction of the time it would take and vice versa, is a pro that was mentioned throughout the study. Participant 4 in Orem said:

*I would prefer for Centro Hispano not to move. It is well located for this community in Provo and around the valley. It would be very far from me because I live maybe 10 minutes away from Centro Hispano. If you move it to Salt Lake, it's 45 minutes so it won't be good for me and for my community. We have thousands of people living around Centro Hispano.*

As mentioned, Utah County is second in line for counties most populated in Utah. Taking the resource out of the second-largest county would only hinder the community and stunt its importance and growth in Utah overall. Salt Lake City may be the capital but Utah is much more than its capital.

Being able to consider the people of Utah as a whole benefits the state, since Centro Hispano's first goal was to help the Latin American low-income and undocumented community.



There are some percentages that should be compared. Salt Lake County has a Hispanic population of 19.2% and a general citizens population of 92.4%, while Utah County has a percentage of 17% of Hispanics and a general citizens population of 92.2% (U.S. Census Bureau Estimates by County, 2022). The percentages compared are not so different. Ultimately, the numbers help us understand that the percentage of Hispanics and general citizens of Utah would be around the same. The idea of expanding resources outside of Salt Lake County would not overcrowd the area even more if the LITC headquarters stayed in Utah County at Centro Hispano. Not to mention, Salt Lake County already has their own branch of the LITC organization. Expanding the Salt Lake location only hinders Utah's growth in the economy.

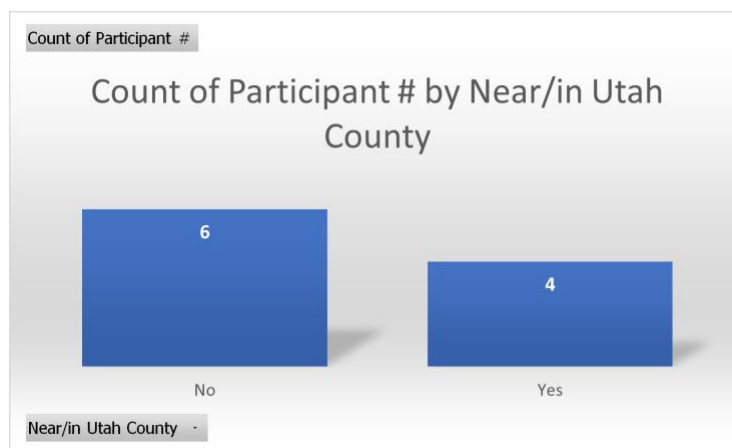
### **Discussion**

Centro Hispano has the option to access their services in person, over the phone, and online. With the data collected, there was only one participant that mentioned they prefer using their services online. Concerns for preferring online services are accessibility and understanding the language. In the 2000s U.S. census, 56% of immigrants from Latin America have less than 12 years of education (Ono and Zavodny, 2008). Taking away an in-person clinic in the Utah County area could affect thousands of immigrants who reside in this area. By doing this, we would be taking away their reliable help and their safety net. If the state wants to thrive, expand its resources, and grow the economy, then distributing resources into different counties will help its people spread and thrive. The state will then be able to build more out of the city and not have so much crowding in one place. As members of the Utah state, our collective goal is to make Utah a great state to stay and live in.

In order to make this research thorough, we decided to have both quantitative and qualitative data. When it comes to collecting data from a high population, the common form of

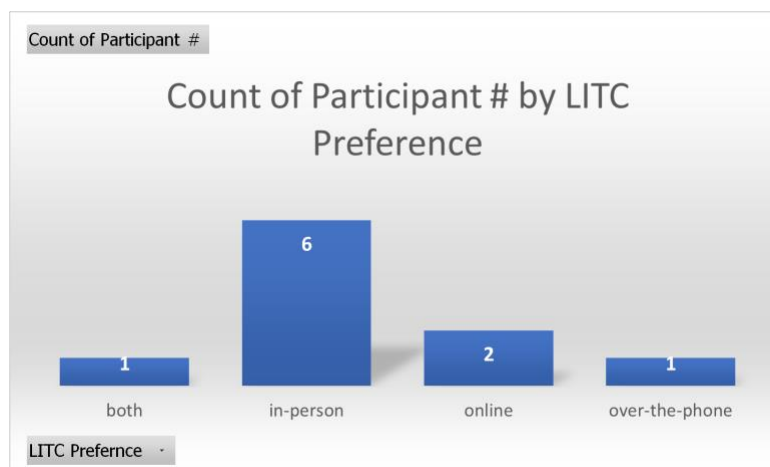
data collection is surveys. However, surveys can only collect vague information. Surveys are beneficial to see numbers but the valuable stories behind those numbers are missed. Surveys can be used to see the satisfaction of the services provided but there is no context as to why such services were used in the first place or why people keep coming back. As for members of Centro Hispano, there are a variety of stories on why their services are used. Using interviews to collect various stories made sense to understand not only the meaningful work of Centro Hispano but also gave us the ability to consider the perspective of the members themselves and what they had to say. Conducting interviews is time-consuming and takes quite some time but understanding the interviewees' story or meaning in the interview is an important sample of the community members and collecting this was crucial. This sample of data was collected from interviews who were volunteers. These volunteers wanted to give their input on how they may or may not be affected by the possible change. The interview questions were set up to understand how and what impact the Centro Hispano has made on these individuals' lives and the lives of their loved ones. This next section will focus on the takeaways from questions in the interview with the data discussing the main points.

One of the questions asked was, “Where do the participants reside?”, was one of the key points to emphasize. The question may seem vague, but when looking at the possible relocation of the LITC, this information is important. The moving of such an impacting organization is understanding the proximity of each member to the current location. Out of the ten interviewees, 60% or 6 out of 10 of the participants do not live in Utah County. This data may look as though moving to Salt Lake City would be the best thing to do but as noted, these participants who live in Salt Lake County, prefer to make the drive to Utah County.



Going along with the proximity to Utah County, another main takeaway from the interviews was the preference for accessing Centro Hispano's LITC. The numbers show 60% (6 out of 10) prefer to use the service in-person, 20% online, 10% over-the-phone, and 10% both in-person and online. This data goes along with the distance between the members to the clinic. There is value in in-person services due to the comfort and security members feel. As mentioned earlier, participants value in-person services because of the genuine hospitality shown by Centro Hispano staff. Some of the 60% who favor in-person services know how to access the services online but enjoy the genuineness of the staff at Centro Hispano and the warm embrace the environment has. However, other members favor in-person services due to barriers to understanding technology.

Centro Hispano has other various services that were mentioned, such as health classes, English classes, and help to access immigration lawyers for members who are undocumented. In the 2000s, the U.S. census 56% of immigrants from Latin America have less than 12 years of education (Ono and Zavodny, 2008). These circumstances stop individuals from pursuing higher education. This is a huge factor in why they are in and stay in poverty.

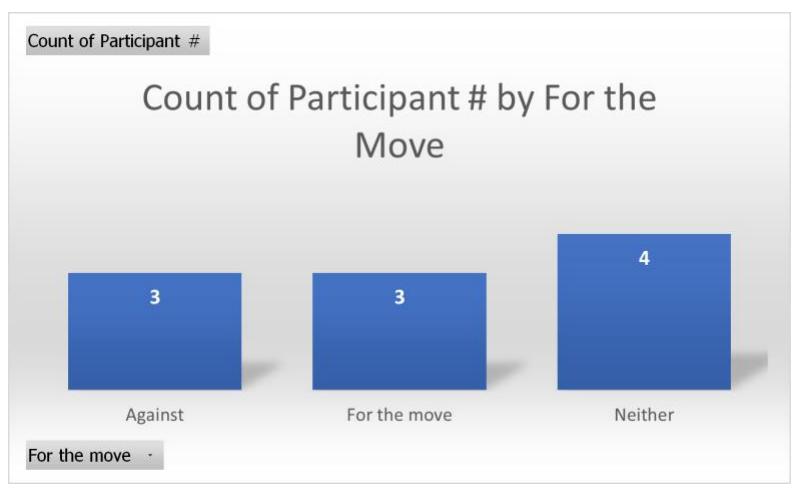


The lack of education makes it difficult to grasp a new language and creates barriers for the people around. Richwine's (2017) article, mentions 41% of immigrants score below the lowest level of English literacy. Richwine describes literacy as understanding, evaluating, and engaging with the text in society, to attain goals, and understand one's knowledge and potential. If 41% of immigrants understand below the lowest level of English literacy, then they would have a difficult time understanding online services due to their lack of education. This is why a high percentage of this sample prefers in-person services.

The last main point from the interview is the question about moving of the clinic to a different location. Understanding where the participants come from and their preferences for services is important, but it is just as important to get a rough number of those who would like the move. Out of the 10 participants, there is 30% (3 out of 10) for the move, 30% (3 out of 10) against the move, and 40% (4 out of 10) neither for or against the move. Based on what was collected, there is little of a preference for the move. The 40% who were on neither side did not mind the move because they live close or have the ability to access the service online. The 30% who were for the move were due to their proximity as it was more convenient for them than

anything else. They told us the move would be beneficial for them since it would be closer and less of a drive but still concerned for the members that were not in the same circumstance. There were multiple participants who mentioned they would prefer to drive to Utah County from Salt Lake County since the traffic was not going to be nearly as bad if the other way around. As for the last 30% who are against the move, these participants live in Utah County and like the location of the current clinic because it gives the community the needed resources and adds value to the area.

Whether near or far from Salt Lake City, our Utah citizens all have a common goal. The goal is to strengthen the communities within the Utah borders. Giving the people of Utah strength through spreading out our resources geographically, will help grow the economy, bring together unity, and educate everyone involved. Centro Hispano may have started out seeking undocumented individuals to help but has since blossomed. The perspective is to help everyone in the community who needs it. The Centro Hispano understands if a community gets what is needed, the people are benefited too. Typically, when the people in the community feel heard, helped, recognized, and safe, unity in diversity inevitably develops and the community becomes



strong and smart together. Our purpose for this research is to give the best option we have for the

people of Utah. If keeping the Low Income Tax Clinic at the Centro Hispano in Provo helps the state stay grounded and grow, then would it not be believed that it is the only option?

## Resources:

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