

The Nuevo South Action Research Collaborative
Notes from First Open Meeting, Organizational Model, and Action Plan
Communication Brief # 2-2010

Ricardo B. Contreras, PhD¹
John H. Pierpont, PhD²
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I. Introduction

The Nuevo South Action Research Collaborative (NSARC) is an organization whose mission is to effect positive change in Latino communities in eastern North Carolina through university-community partnership building in research and action. The NSARC began in the spring of 2009 with academics from the East Carolina University (ECU) Department of Anthropology in collaboration with a small number of community leaders. At the time, the collaborative had the name *Nuevo South Community Research Initiative (NSCRI)*, emphasizing the articulation of research and community. Since then, a number of action-research projects have been implemented and new faculty members and students from different academic units have become involved. In the first year, the collaborative became more inclusive in terms of university participation, but not enough in terms of community involvement. In response, a decision was made to call for an open meeting with the purpose of transforming the collaborative into an open coalition that would involve as many university and community representatives as possible. The meeting was held on April 23rd, 2010, at the ECU Willis Building, and was the first step toward this new vision of Nuevo South. This report presents a summary of that meeting, a proposed model for the collaborative, an action plan, and concluding comments.

II. Summary of Meeting

Over 50 people, including grassroots community members, service providers, researchers, and students attended the meeting. In plenary and small group discussions, participants discussed a number of issues and responded to specific questions that were put to the group. Some discussants spoke only English, some only Spanish, and several were bilingual. The questions and a summary of responses to each respective question are given below.

Question 1 *What do you hope a community research collaborative can do for you and your group?*

Discussants stated that everyone needs to understand the needs of the community better, to evaluate what is in-place and working well, and to ensure there is follow-through on projects that are undertaken. Conversations are needed between grassroots community members and researchers. Communication, trust and respect must be established. Partnerships among community members, service providers, and researchers must be based on equality, mutual respect, and must balance the

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology East Carolina University.

² Associate Professor, School of Social Work East Carolina University.

needs of community members and researchers. Through such partnerships based on trust and respect, the research collaborative can help identify community needs and ways to address them. Finally, the collaborative can educate service providers and employees of governmental organizations through cultural competency and awareness training. According to participants, at present, many Latinos are turned away from services because of cultural and language barriers.

*Question 2 What do you think of the goals of the Nuevo South as stated in the proposal?
How would you improve/change them?*

Participants stated that the goals should be presented in language that is more egalitarian, establishing partnerships between the community and the university. They also agreed that another goal is needed that specifies advocacy as an explicit purpose of the NSARC. The advocacy component would enable partners in the collaborative to respond quickly to current events, to educate people regarding issues, and to bring community people together to respond to issues. Other comments about the goals were not substantive, but focused on their presentation. For example, some thought the goals sounded more like objectives; others thought the goals should be more succinct or more like a mission statement.

*Question 3 What are the areas of community life that you think need to be addressed by the
Nuevo South?*

Of the participants' responses to these questions, six concerned education:

- Academic education for all
- Health education
- Education on services available, where services are located, and how to connect persons to the appropriate service
- Educating the majority about cultural sensitivity and issues of new immigrants, and
- Include bilingual education in school curricula
- English as a Second Language

Other areas of concern included:

- Housing
- Lack of Latino infrastructure to develop Latino community leaders
- Family support
- Preparing agencies to better serve the Latino population, and
- Improved communication between parents and schools.

Participants also identified a need to address physical and emotional abuse, animosity, and hate crimes toward Latinos. Finally, participants agreed that the needs of farm workers should be considered and that they have much to offer academics and service providers in fulfilling the mission of the collaborative.

Question 4 What do you think of the guiding philosophical principles of the Nuevo South as stated in the proposal? How would you improve/change them?

Participants did not address directly this question about Nuevo South's philosophical principles. Rather, they focused on more practical matters such as enhancing established programs already in place, focusing on connecting and networking, overcoming obstacles to connecting people, e.g., self-interest, and how to move the organization forward.

Question 5 How should we govern ourselves?

Participants suggested an advisory board "comprised of community members, stakeholders, people who want to volunteer, faculty and students of ECU." The advisory board should be small enough to function efficiently, perhaps no more than ten people would be best. It should have representation from grassroots community members, service providers, and academics—students and faculty. Finally, participants agreed that Ricardo Contreras of the ECU Department of Anthropology, should lead the NSARC as its director.

III. The NSARC Model

The discussions that took place in the meeting of April 23 provided the basis for a model of the NSARC. This model is stated below for the consideration of the members of the collaborative:

1. Name of the Organization

Responding to the expressed desire by participants in the meeting that the organization integrates research and action activities through partnership building, the organization will be known as The Nuevo South Action Research Collaborative (NSARC), with the sub-title "Strengthening Latinos in Eastern North Carolina through University-Community Collaboration." This name represents well the need to focus the group on the felt-needs of the Latino community through an approach combining research and social intervention. The inclusion of the word "collaborative" reflects the fundamental principles of collaboration, reciprocity, and equity.

2. Mission

To effect positive change in Latino communities in eastern North Carolina through university-community partnership building in research and action.

3. Goals

The goals of the NSARC are as follows:

- a. Establish a strong and sustainable partnership between the university, grassroots organizations, and service providers, for the development and well-being of the Latino community of eastern North Carolina.
- b. Address the felt-needs of the Latino community through an organic strategy combining research, service-learning, implementation of solutions, and advocacy.
- c. Develop methodologies and models of collaborative action research that respond to the social and cultural characteristics of the Latino community of eastern North Carolina.

4. Guiding Principles

The NSARC will be guided by a set of fundamental principles which will be present in all of the initiatives implemented by participants. These principles are as follows:

- a. Accountability. Participating researchers, grassroots organizations, and service providers should be accountable to the people in the community with whom they work. This means that people should be clearly made aware of the nature of projects, the funding sources (and how much of that funding goes to the people or the community group), and their impact. At the same time, researchers and organizations should respond to the community when information is requested. Although these conditions are intrinsic to a true participatory process, and some of them are included in all university research projects through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent form, it is necessary to make them explicit as founding principles of the NSARC. All projects implemented through this collaborative will be expected to comply with these principles.
- b. Social responsiveness of research. Related to accountability is the conviction that all research activities implemented through the NSARC should be responsive to felt needs of the community defined by the members of this collaborative formally (e.g., through needs assessments and asset mapping studies) and informally (e.g., through consensus). Although we recognize that good research does not necessarily have to be socially responsive, the NSARC will only sponsor studies that comply with this condition.
- c. Participation. The identification of areas of need and community assets, the research process, and the implementation of solutions, need to be participatory. That is, community people should be involved in varying degrees of intensity in each stage of a project cycle. The intensity of people's participation will depend on the nature of the project. An effort should be made to involve individual residents and not only community organizations.
- d. Knowledge Equivalence. There is a fundamental equivalence between academic and community/popular knowledge. These systems of knowledge are of equal value, neither is superior to the other.

- e. Reciprocity. The collaborative should strive to meet the needs of the community and of academics/students. Commonly, the needs of the community are related to finding and implementing solutions to social problems. Meanwhile, the needs of academics/students are commonly related to learning and producing new knowledge, and representing that knowledge in the form of written products, participation in academic meetings, and other scholarly activity. The NSARC will bridge the gap between these two players through a balanced, complementary, and reciprocal agenda.

5. Core Activities

As an action and research collaborative, the NSARC will strive toward an organic and dynamic approach to community work through research and social intervention. An effort will be made to approach each problem, as much as possible, through four core activities. These activities are described below:

- a. Research. Activities to enhance the understanding of the local, regional, and transnational Latino communities in eastern North Carolina through the study of key social, cultural, and economic issues. Also, studies that help develop strategies and methodologies to strengthen the community and improve the delivery of services.
- b. Volunteering and Service-learning. Through curricular and non-curricular activities, involve students with grassroots organizations and service providers serving the Latino community. Students can be engaged in general support activities, guided research, or anything else that is agreed upon between the organization, the student, and the university. Student involvement in the community will be supported by the ECU Volunteering and Service-Learning Center.
- c. Implementation of Solutions. Activities aimed at implementing solutions to issues and social problems identified by the collaborative. For example, a youth leadership program, a lay health advisor project, and a mentoring program.
- d. Advocacy. Develop unified fronts to engage in public debates around critical issues affecting the Latino community, such as immigration, health disparities, political participation, and access to education.

6. Focus Areas:

Five areas will constitute the foci of the collaborative. These are as follows:

- a. Community and Capacity Building. Activities aimed at strengthening the network of Latino organizations, building organizational capacity, and developing leadership.

- b. Culture. Activities aimed at studying, enhancing, and celebrating the culture of Latinos in eastern North Carolina as well as their contributions to larger society. This includes the arts, sports, education, science, and humanities. These activities will help shape the public image of Latinos, enhance the connections with larger society, and help strengthen cultural identity.
- c. Migration and Settlement. Activities aimed at increasing the understanding of the migration and settlement experience of Latinos in eastern North Carolina, and to finding solutions to problems associated with that experience. These activities will take local, regional, and transnational perspectives.
- d. Education. Activities dealing with the key educational issues affecting the Latino community of eastern North Carolina. These may include retention and drop-out of school-age children, access to post-secondary education (community college and university), learning English as a second language, and adult education.
- e. Health and Human Services. Activities related to accessing and using health and human services, promoting healthy lifestyles, and changing conditions of health inequity affecting the Latino population of eastern North Carolina.

Each focus area will be co-coordinated by an ECU faculty and a member of the community. The co-coordinators will have the following responsibilities:

- a. Putting together a team for the area
- b. Developing ideas for initiatives
- c. Finding resources (writing grant proposals)
- d. Implementing projects
- e. At the end of each project, writing an executive-summary describing the project and its results, and in the case of research, translating findings into proposals for implementation. The executive summaries will be published on the website of the NSARC.

7. Target Population and Geographic Area

The NSARC will work to involve Latino people and organizations from all over eastern North Carolina³³. The richness of the NSARC will rest on its capacity to be truly inclusive and to become a faithful reflection of the social and cultural diversity that characterizes these communities.

³³ For the purposes of the Nuevo South Collaborative, eastern North Carolina is configured by the 41 counties that make up the catchment area of ECU (see <http://core.ecu.edu/umc/enc/>).

8. Governance

The NSARC governance formula will ensure the equal representation in decision-making of the university, grassroots organizations, and service providers. The governance body will include a director and an advisory board. The tasks of the director will include:

- a. Provide leadership.
- b. Propose an agenda to the Advisory Board.
- c. Upon approval, coordinate the implementation of the agenda.
- d. Facilitate processes of partnership building between university individuals and community people/organizations.
- e. Coordinate the maintenance of the NSARC website.
- f. Coordinate the writing of semi-annual reports of activities.

The Advisory Board will be constituted by representatives of the university, grassroots organizations, and service providers, in equal numbers. The Board will have the following tasks:

- a. Approve the agenda for the collaborative
- b. Identify initiatives and areas of work
- c. Evaluate the work of the director
- d. Set policies

As suggested in the meeting of April 23, it is proposed that the first director of the NSARC be Ricardo B. Contreras, an applied anthropologist by training and a faculty member of the ECU Department of Anthropology. Mr. Contreras is one of the founding members of the NSARC and has coordinated it since its establishment in spring 2009. It is also proposed for the consideration of the members of the collaborative that the position of director be renewed every two years. The Advisory Board will meet twice a semester (September and December) and the meeting location will rotate between Greenville and the home locations of the current members of the collaborative (i.e., Kinston, Greensboro, and Tarboro). Finally, the meetings of the Advisory Board will be opened to all.

IV. Action Plan

As we build the NSARC, a number of tasks should be completed in summer and fall 2010. These are as follows:

1. Establish the advisory board.
2. Identify the co-coordinators of each focus area.
3. Hold two meetings of the advisory board. The board meetings will be open to all.
4. The director regularly updates the website of the collaborative.
5. The co-coordinators will present a plan of activities for fall 2010.
6. Each area implements the proposed activities.

7. The co-coordinators will present a report of activities at the end of the year.
8. The director will present a report of activities at the end of the year.

The timeline of tasks is the following:

| Tasks | Months 2010 | | | | | | |
|---|-------------|------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| | June | July | August | September | October | November | December |
| Establish the advisory board | | | | | | | |
| Select the area co-coordinators | | | | | | | |
| First meeting of the advisory board (open to all) | | | | | | | |
| Second meeting of the advisory board (open to all) | | | | | | | |
| Update the website | | | | | | | |
| Area co-coordinators present plans for each area | | | | | | | |
| Each area implements is proposed activities | | | | | | | |
| Area co-coordinators present first bi-annual report for each area | | | | | | | |
| Director presents first bi-annual report | | | | | | | |

Additionally, a number of ideas of projects are proposed as a starting point for the collaborative. Some of these ideas do not require funding for implementation, while others do. It is suggested that the ones that do not require funding be implemented first. The following are the proposals:

Community and Capacity Building:

Providing grassroots organizations and community residents computer instruction.

Through volunteering and/or service-learning activities, ECU students would provide basic computer instruction to members of grassroots organizations as well as groups of community residents. People would be trained on basic personal computing, including the use of word processors, the e-mail system, and internet browsing. This project would make use of the computer technology knowledge and competency of ECU students to satisfy an important felt-need of the Latino community. [No funding required]

Providing community residents English as a Second Language instruction. Through volunteering and/or service-learning activities, ECU students would provide English as a Second Language instruction to groups of community residents brought together by

grassroots organizations. Learning English is one of the key felt-needs of the Latino community of this area. [No funding required]

Youth leadership training institute. Implement at ECU a Latino youth leadership institute. This idea comes from the acknowledgement by several community leaders that there is a leadership vacuum in the younger generations. The institute would provide training on key areas of community development and civic participation. [Funding required]

Building a network of Latino grassroots organizations. Latino grassroots organizations in eastern North Carolina are not interconnected and they do not configure a functioning network for mutual support and growth. This initiative would develop linkages between organizations, arrange for capacity building activities, and ultimately contribute to strengthen the Latino community. [Some activities do not require funding, while others do. This is a long-term program]

Culture:

Cultural activities at the ECU Hispanic Heritage Month. Organize a number of activities at ECU during the October Hispanic Heritage Month, showing different expressions of Latino culture. Also, put together a roundtable with community leaders and faculty/students to discuss important issues affecting the Latino community, such as immigration, education, and so on. (Thanks to Jeniffer Valko and Lisa Robertson for this project). [No funding required]

Education:

Mentoring program at ECU for Latino students. As a way of improving the rate of retention of Latino students at ECU, establish a mentoring program whereby faculty and students will mentor incoming students. This program does not make use of resources except the time and willingness of ECU faculty and students. [No funding required]

Scholarship program. Developing a scholarship program for Latino youth from eastern North Carolina that would allow them to enroll in the university when their residency status precludes them from applying to existing funding sources. [Funding required]

Health and Human Services:

Cultural competency training. Activities to develop cultural competency among service providers. [Funding required]

Bridging the gap between services and community through lay health advisors-promotores (as) de la salud. Training residents to promote healthy lifestyles and inform the Latino community on health and human services resources. [Funding required]

V. Concluding Comments

The Nuevo South Action Research Collaborative (NSARC) is a university-community collaborative whose purpose is to improve living and working conditions among Latinos in eastern North Carolina through research and action. The NSARC principles include participation of grassroots community members as well as academics and service providers, the fundamental equality of academic and community/local knowledge, and a complementary, balanced, and reciprocal agenda. Efforts will be made to avoid transforming the NSARC into an academic project concerned merely with the interests and needs of faculty and students. Through research, volunteer/service learning, actions to solve community problems, and advocacy, the NSARC is working to be a positive force in the Latino community in eastern North Carolina.