

Latina Advocacy Framework:

National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities

A Project of Casa de Esperanza

Celebrate our cultures

Apoyar a nuestra juventud

**HEAR OUR
VOICES**

Reconocer nuestra fuerza

**HONOR OUR
TRADITIONS**

Latina Advocacy Framework:

Latina Advocacy Overview

In 2006 Casa de Esperanza began a critical time of reflection and discussion that is transforming our advocacy with Latinas and their families. We believe that our thinking can influence domestic violence advocacy for Latinas throughout the country.

This “organizational conversation” represented another stage in Casa de Esperanza’s development. By 2006 we had provided bilingual advocacy for almost twenty-five years and a high percentage of our Family Advocates were bicultural. But we decided to address the fact that our training in mainstream advocacy practice (the standard training available) provided the foundation for our advocacy—a foundation that is not Latina-centered.

We grappled with essential questions—both theoretical and practical:

- What is effective Latina advocacy? How are cultural norms supported by our policies and procedures?
- What daily practice stems from effective Latina advocacy?

Our discussion broke new ground. Many domestic violence organizations have recognized that the usual domestic violence approach doesn’t work for them, but they have stopped short of defining *what works*.

Latina reality was fundamental to our dialogue. Our collective orientation and cultural lens of family and community stand in sharp contrast to the individualistic orientation of mainstream culture. Often, daily decisions are based on the good of the whole. Acculturation, religious beliefs, and a highly relational way of thinking, are frequently important elements of a Latina’s life.

These realities led us to re-examine the usual domestic violence approach—which includes a linear thought process, individualism, and clear-cut boundaries. Often one advocate works with the battered woman while other advocates work with her children. If a battered woman’s decisions are considered “inappropriate,” her advocate may decide not to continue working with her.

We have taken the risk to determine *what best supports Latinas*. We want to honor the collective orientation and family-centered lives. We know Latinas are strong, and we want to acknowledge—with our action—that each woman knows what is best for her and her family. The effectiveness and integrity of our work depends on this critical re-thinking. But our greatest motivation is to honor the wisdom of each Latina.

The following pages provide more information on what it means to provide Latina-based advocacy services.

- Latina Advocacy Framework
- Comparison of Domestic Violence Models
- Latina Cultural Context and Advocacy
- Characteristics of a Latina Advocate

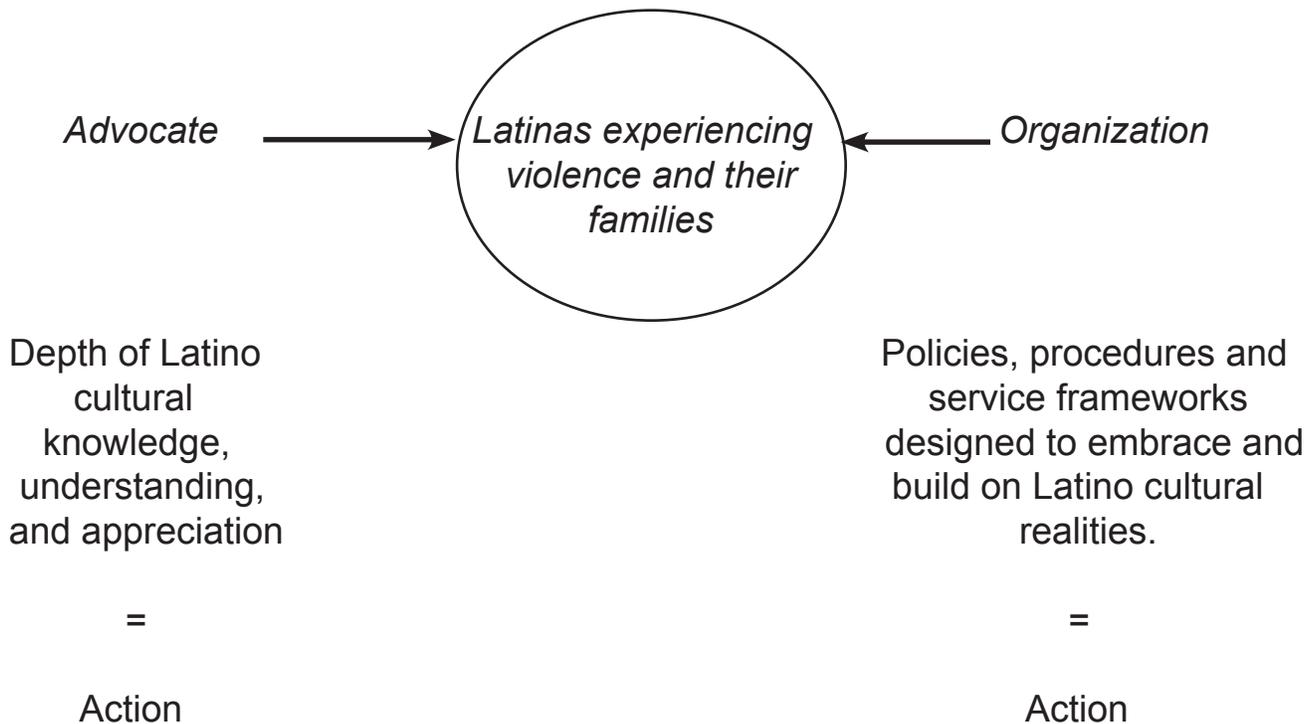
Latina Advocacy Framework:

*Latina Advocacy Framework**

The role of an effective domestic violence advocate is to listen to a woman, support her in her decisions, and be creative. It can be summarized by the **four P's**: be **patient**, **proactive**, **positive**, and a **problem-solver**.

Latina advocacy is much more than speaking Spanish, being Latina, or understanding cultural differences.** It is a mindset...a framework for approaching advocacy with Latinas. The following diagram represents the framework of Casa de Esperanza's Latina Advocacy and is based on more than twenty-five years of domestic violence advocacy with battered Latinas.

Successful Latina advocacy is a combination of both organizational commitment and the individual advocate's commitment and training. **Quality Latina advocacy is not possible without both of these components—no matter how hard you work at it.**



*Advocacy model designed to serve immigrant Latinas and those raised in the USA with strong ties to Latino cultures, customs, and traditions.

**Please see comparison document, A Comparison of Domestic Violence Models.

Latina Advocacy Framework:

A Comparison of Domestic Violence Advocacy Models

The following chart compares domestic violence advocacy models. Casa de Esperanza hopes that your organization can carefully consider how your advocates work with battered women and specifically with battered Latinas. This document also serves as a reference for your continued exploration into effective advocacy for Latinas.

"Typical" domestic violence advocacy	Effective mainstream advocacy	"Basic" Latina advocacy	Effective Latina advocacy
Emphasis is on what the woman in crisis needs to succeed.	Believing in the strength of women.	Believing in the strength of women.	Believing in the strength of women within the context of family and community.
Making decisions for battered women: what time to go to bed, what to do for fun, how to raise their children, etc.	Treating battered women the way that we would want to be treated.	Understanding basic cultural differences. Speaking Spanish.	Possessing an understanding (and deep appreciation) of Latino cultures, histories, religions, and oppression in the USA. This knowledge informs the entire advocacy approach with women.
Supporting women when they make "appropriate" decisions, e.g., leaving the abuser for good.	Not making assumptions or judgments about her decisions. Listening to what the battered woman is saying.	Not making assumptions or judgments about her decisions. Listening to what the battered woman is saying.	Supporting the decisions of the woman. Understanding that decisions are often based on cultural norms and practices, e.g., family unity or religion.
Being knowledgeable about support services, transitional housing, therapy, and parenting groups.	Being knowledgeable about resources; solving problems; thinking that is level-headed and creative.	Being knowledgeable about Latino resources in the community.	Being knowledgeable about Latino resources and mainstream resources. Working with women to "navigate" the mainstream systems and access nontraditional resources.
Supporting women to leave; sometimes supporting women when they decide to go back to abusers.	Truly supporting women in their decisions—even if the advocate doesn't "agree" with it.	Truly supporting women in their decisions—even if the advocate doesn't "agree" with it.	Truly supporting women in their decisions—even if the advocate doesn't "agree" with it.
Framework for service: individual needs of woman.	Framework for service: family-centered.	Framework for service: family-centered.	Framework for service: family-centered and collective orientation.
Service Approach: needs-based, individualized case planning.	Service-Approach: self-identified goal planning.	Service-Approach: self-identified goal planning.	Service-Approach: warmth, connection, "me siento en casa cuando estoy contigo."

Latina Advocacy Framework:

Latina Cultural Context and Advocacy

Cultural context shapes everyone's life. It is critical for domestic violence advocates working with Latinas* to be knowledgeable of Latina cultural context and to allow that context to inform their advocacy.

The cultural context of Latinas' lives includes three components: experience, reality, and consciousness.

Experience

This component addresses a Latina's daily experience.

Factors:

- Her age when she immigrated or when she was born here.
- Education level and socio-economic level—here and in her country of origin.
- Language ability in both Spanish and English.
- Immigration status in the USA.
- Past experience with mainstream systems and individuals.

Reality

This component addresses her “way of living.”

Factors:

- Familia comes first, regardless of good or bad, triumph or turmoil.
- Familia is made up of nuclear and extended members as well as close friends.
- Daily decisions are based on the good of the “whole,” not the “individual.”
- Religion is a fundamental influence.

Consciousness

This component addresses the “way of thinking.”

Factors:

- Socialized with an extended family structure.
- Interdependent, highly relational.
- Story-telling is a method of communication.
- Great importance is placed on traditions, cultural celebrations, sharing of food, music, art, and dance.
- Living in the moment—not in the future.

This cultural context is the “lens” through which Latinas see the world. The lens informs their successes, challenges, goals, and needs. Placing priority on family and community, the lens affects how Latinas understand their personal situations and make decisions.

Cultural context and lens shape the type of support, advocacy, and services that a Latina seeks as well as the choices that she makes. These cultural realities must, therefore, influence how domestic violence advocates work with, support, and advocate for battered Latinas; develop new initiatives; and work within Latino communities.

Effective Latina advocacy—what best serves Latinas—requires that both advocates and domestic violence organizations understand Latina cultural context and how it affects a Latina's reality and decisions; and shape their work accordingly.

*The term Latinas, represents immigrant Latinas and those raised in the USA with strong ties to Latino cultures, customs, and traditions.

Latina Advocacy Framework:

Characteristics of a Latina Advocate

Quality Latina advocacy begins with the advocate, and it is much deeper than being Latina or speaking Spanish. The following list is Casa de Esperanza's attempt at capturing the subtleties that make for an effective Latina advocate.

Respect

The advocate has an innate ability to show respect towards the participant. This respect is deeper than simply understanding her situation. It is a respect for her as a woman, as a mother, as a human being. It is the ability to create an environment of respect that tells the woman that the advocate respects her life and her decisions. It is as if the advocate sees and believes in the wisdom of the woman.

Openness

The advocate has an ability to create an environment of openness with the participant. To create this environment, the advocate is able to sense how each woman communicates. Some tell their situation through stories, others speak very little, others don't speak at all. A Latina advocate is able to gauge where the woman is at, and is as comfortable sitting with the woman without speaking as she is listening to her stories. Listening is the first component to openness, and the next step is what the advocate does once she creates a safe environment for the woman. Openness also involves demonstrating that the advocate will listen to and not judge for form an opinion of the woman based on her past decisions or her world view.

Resourcefulness

The advocate has ability to access traditional and non-traditional domestic violence services. Some of the best Latina advocates have an innate ability to work with resources that are found in community instead of in traditional systems. The usual first step for an advocate is to look to government systems however for many Latinas these systems are inaccessible. Sometimes, it is due to language barriers other times, mistrust of government is an issue based on the woman's experience in her country of origin. Some Latinas without documentation are cut out of traditional support and other Latinas born in the US have a deep experience with racism from individuals and institutions. The Latina advocate understands these varied realities of participants and develops networks and relationships with associations, organizations, and some institutions that are willing to provide culturally sensitive support. Often, the need to access resources are the same for Latinas as other women, however, a Latina advocate's job is to have an in-depth understanding and connection to both formal and informal resources that exist within the community.

Temple (in English it is temperament, personality)

The advocate has a personality that is calm, steady, and reliable. She has a clear head in a crisis situation, and is able to think through various scenarios when speaking with or working with a woman. She goes the extra mile to provide support and services help the participant to achieve her goals. Her personality is one of a constant, steady presence. When crisis arises, she effectively diffuses the situation.

Latina Advocacy Framework:

Definitions

Mainstream Culture

Represents the majority culture (usually Caucasian or white), individuals who have assimilated, and institutions that hold power.

Mainstream Organization

An organization that is led predominately by individuals from the majority culture, and utilizing mainstream values as a basis for decision-making, process, and procedures.

Culturally Affirming Organization

An organization that has a deep appreciation for the value that culture brings to its staff, operations, management and leadership and reflects this appreciation in decision-making, process, and procedures. The organization understands the profound impact of culture in the lives of its internal and external constituents. People and communities of color feel welcomed and respected in this organization.

Culturally Specific Organization

An organization that fully reflects one cultural/racial group's reality. This reflection is seen throughout the organization through a majority representation of staff, supervisors, senior management and board of directors. Decision-making, process, and procedures clearly reflect cultural/racial realities—though they may differ from mainstream models. The constituency group is clearly defined and served.