

Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities

Edited by
José Luis Irizarry



Hello!

Greetings!

¡Hola!

Hey
there!

¡Saludos!

What's
up?

¡Buenas!

¿Qué tal?

¿Qué onda?

**Public Administration,
Civic Engagement,
and Spanish-Speaking
Communities**

**Praise for *Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and
Spanish-Speaking Communities***

Dr. Irizarry and his colleagues have assembled a groundbreaking volume that is sure to become the go-to source for scholars, practitioners, and casual readers interested in the implications of social equity and governance issues in Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. This book equips readers with essential knowledge at a time when the appropriateness of policies and practices aimed at addressing long-standing structural inequities is being challenged.

Patria de Lancer Julnes, PhD

2023–2025 President, American Society for Public Administration &
Rosenthal Endowed Professor and Director,
School of Public Administration,
University of New Mexico

In *Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities*, Dr. José Luis Irizarry and a distinguished group of thought leaders make a compelling case for the necessity of language access in the United States. This essential work champions social equity and calls for statewide initiatives that foster culturally competent agencies, enhancing public service for diverse communities.

By distinguishing between cultural awareness and true cultural competence, the authors emphasize the need for actionable strategies across public, private, and nonprofit sectors. They advocate for robust bilingual, translation, and interpretation services, ensuring that English learners can access vital programs and benefits.

This book is a vital resource for anyone committed to dismantling access barriers and promoting inclusivity in public administration. It challenges scholars and practitioners alike to prioritize language access, reinforcing the economic and social importance of providing language assistance to multilingual speakers.

RaJade M. Berry-James, PhD

2023-2024 President, Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration
Fellow, National Academy of Public Administration
Senior Associate Dean of Faculty and Academic Affairs
Professor of Public Administration
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs
Virginia Commonwealth University

Dr. Irizarry's edited book is a timely contribution to the field of public administration. Dr. Irizarry and the chapter contributors underscore the critical relationship between the public sector and Spanish-speaking communities. At a point in society where Spanish-speaking communities have become increasingly targeted by the federal government and public entities, Dr. Irizarry's book is most essential for public administrators and students of the field. The book provides a necessary framework, skills, and tools for effective civic engagement with Spanish-speaking communities. The advancement of social equity in the public sector requires the knowledge and skills for engagement with the diverse Latino populations of the United States, and Dr. Irizarry's book serves as a requisite reading for current and future public administrators.

Tony J. Carrizales, PhD

Professor and Chair, Department of Public and
Nonprofit Administration, Marist University

Public Administration and Social Equity

Series Editor: Richard Gregory Johnson III

In the 21st century, the most pressing, wicked problems all involve issues of social equity. Whether global climate change, natural disasters, development and resource usage, political oppression, police killings, genocide, COVID-19, international matters and more, social inequities abound. If the world is to be more equitable throughout the 21st century and into the 22nd century, administrators and scholars in all sectors must be competent in how to promote fairness for all.

Still, classical training in public administration has often emphasized skills like planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting. Historically, teaching equity has not been a priority for many MPA and doctoral programs. Yet to better train/educate administrators/scholars in how to foster social equity, they must be exposed to the complex dynamics involved in diagnosing, understanding, and resolving inequities. Contributed works, individual or dual authored monographs, handbooks, encyclopedias etc. are all welcomed for consideration in this series.

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Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities

Edited by

José Luis Irizarry

North Carolina Central University, USA



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This edited volume is dedicated to my mother, Milagros Crespo—a woman who, in countless ways, taught me how to survive, how to care, how to face life’s injustices, and most importantly, how to value family—even the kind we create beyond blood.

While our relationship was not always defined by the traditional roles of mother and child, but often the reverse, she remained my unwavering anchor. She grounded me personally and culturally, shaping the man I am today and tethering me to my Puerto Rican heritage.

In my earliest years, she taught me independence through tradition—starting with how to make sofrito, the soul of Puerto Rican cooking. She guided me in learning to read and speak Spanish by reading *El Diario La Prensa* and watching novelas like *Marimar* and *La Fea Más Bella*.

In her final days, with extraordinary grace, she used her last wishes to introduce and connect me with a maternal family I never knew I had—ensuring that even after her passing, I would not be alone. Her legacy is my foundation.

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CONTENTS

About the Editor	xi
About the Contributors.....	xiii
Preface	xxiii
Book Abstract.....	xxv
Acknowledgments.....	xxvii
Introduction.....	1
<i>José Luis Irizarry</i>	
1 The Social Construction of [American] Identity and Language in the Public Sphere	21
<i>José Luis Irizarry, Michelle D. Evans, Zach Ridder and Angel Emmanuel Jaimes-Valdez</i>	
2 Nonprofits and Civil Society: Fostering Social Equity & Civic Engagement	53
<i>Michelle D. Evans</i>	
3 News, Social Equity, and Spanish-Speaking Communities: The Importance of Traditional News Formats in an Era of Nontraditional News Providers.....	77
<i>Jason R. Piscia</i>	
4 Social Media, Social Equity, and Spanish-Speaking Communities.....	105
<i>Jourdan A. Davis, Danielle “Dannie” Kyle and José Luis Irizarry</i>	

5	Local Government Engagement With Latinx and Spanish-Speaking Communities	137
	<i>Leonor Camarena, Nicole Humphrey, Ángel Luis Molina, Jr. and Shannon K. Portillo</i>	
6	Health and Human Service Delivery, Social Equity, and Spanish-Speaking Communities	155
	<i>Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez, Ramón Ruiz and Vanessa Diez</i>	
7	Homelessness, Social Equity, and Spanish-Speaking Communities.....	179
	<i>Paige Laine Moore and Hillary J. Knepper</i>	
8	Latinxs Interactions With the Police Agencies in the United States: A Systematic Quantitative Literature Review	199
	<i>David Topel and Roddrick Colvin</i>	
9	Immigration Law, Social (In)Equity, and the Immigration-Crime-Nexus	229
	<i>Krystlelynn Caraballo, Daniela Oramas Mora and Anthony Peguero</i>	
10	Civic Engagement and Social Equity: Democracies, Voting, Political Systems and Spanish-Speaking Communities	263
	<i>Emiliano Vera</i>	
11	A Study of Equitable Access to Crisis Information for Latino Populations.....	293
	<i>Brittany “Brie” Haupt, Jason D. Rivera and Claire Connolly Knox</i>	
	Conclusion: Putting It Together and Looking Forward	319
	<i>José Luis Irizarry</i>	
	Appendix A: Implicit Bias and Implications for Social Equity: A Reflexive Written Activity	335
	Appendix B: Academic Engagement Through the Rios Laboratory: An Equity Model for Inclusion in Research.....	347
	Appendix C: A Reflexive, Mindfulness-Based, Social Equity Learning Activity: Multimedia Expression and Communication Connecting Historical, Political, and Societal Topics With Art, Music, and Public Service.....	365
	Appendix D: #SELC2022 Conference Program Selected Excerpts.....	387

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Dr. José Luis Irizarry is an Assistant Professor of Public Administration and Director of the Graduate Nonprofit Management Certificate at North Carolina Central University (NCCU). A proud Puerto Rican, former NYC foster youth (ages 9–21), member of the LGBTQ+ community, and first-generation college and doctoral graduate who embraces being neurodivergent. Following his mom’s passing, he became “bro-dad” to her three cats and two aquatic turtles, now his emotional support animals.

In higher education, Dr. Irizarry has instructed over 1,400 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students across 80+ course sections in criminal justice, public administration, and nonprofit studies, with appointments in New York, Florida, Illinois, and North Carolina. His research focuses on public and nonprofit pedagogy, public service values, social equity, civic engagement, and mindfulness. His scholarship appears in leading journals, including *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ)*, *Public Integrity*, the *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs (JPNA)*, and the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration (JSEPA)*, and in multiple edited volumes on civic engagement and public and nonprofit studies. He is currently co-editing a special themed issue of the *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership (JNEL)* on Foster Care and Adoption expected to be published in late 2025/early 2026.

Dr. Irizarry serves on the editorial board of *Public Integrity* and the *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership* and holds national leadership roles, with the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA). He also served as the 2022 Co-Chair of the National Academy of Public Administration’s Social Equity Leadership Conference (SELC). As a practitioner, he has worked in a diverse range of nonprofit organizations, serving historically marginalized communities in roles spanning advocacy, education, and direct service.

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Dr. Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez is a queer Puerto Rican social work practitioner, educator, and researcher. He completed a BSW from Dalton State College and an MSW with a Clinical Concentration and a PhD in Social Work, both from the University of Georgia. He also has had the opportunity to engage in global social work experiences in various Latin American countries. Dr. Alvarez-Hernandez's research focuses on the structural and social determinants of health of Latine, LGBTQ+, and immigrant communities with a particular attention to the liberatory experiences of people living at the intersections of these identities. He is the author of the book, "*See Me! Gay and Trans Latinos' Testimonios on Mental Health, Discrimination, and Joy in South Texas*," which won the 2025 Best Book Award from the LGBT Advocacy Alliance Section of the American Society for Public Administration. His work is informed by over 10 years of experience as a bilingual (English and Spanish) clinical social worker in mental health and healthcare settings, and by critical and feminist theories.

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Dr. Roddrick Colvin is a Professor of Public Administration and the Director of the School of Public Affairs at San Diego State University. The School houses criminal justice, public administration, and city planning. His current research interests include public employment equity, police officers' shared perceptions and decision-making, and LGBTQ civil rights. His research has appeared in a number of scholarly journals, including the *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, *Police Quarterly*, and *Women and Criminal Justice*. He is also the author of the book *Gay and Lesbian Cops: Diversity and Effective Policing* (Lynne Rienner Publishing). Dr. Colvin earned undergraduate degrees in political science and philosophy at Indiana University–Bloomington, a graduate degree in public administration at Seattle University, and a doctorate degree in public administration at the University at Albany (SUNY).

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Dr. Brittany “Brie” Haupt, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness Department with research interests of cultural competency, emergency and crisis management, crisis communication, and community resilience.

She has published in *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*, *Disaster Prevention and Management*, *Risk, Hazards, and Crisis in Public Policy*, *Journal of Emergency Management*, and *Frontiers in Communication* section on Disaster communications. Dr. Haupt's award-winning book with Dr. Claire Connolly Knox on *Cultural Competence for Emergency and Crisis Management: Concepts, Theories, and Case Studies* offers educators a roadmap for successfully engaging participants in various aspects of cultural competency knowledge, skills, and abilities. This text received the American Society of Public Administration's Section on Democracy and Social Justice's 2021 Book of the Year Award.

Dr. Nicole Humphrey is an Assistant Professor in the School of Public Affairs and Administration at the University of Kansas. Her research connects public administration and organizational behavior, primarily focusing on emotional labor, diversity, and equity. She has been published in multiple research journals, including *Review of Public Personnel Administration* and *Administration & Society*.

Dr. Amml Hussein is President-elect of the National Association of Social Workers, New Jersey Chapter, where she advances quality research curricula across undergraduate and graduate programs. A seasoned social worker, educator, and researcher, she brings over 13 years of experience spanning research methodology, instructional design, private practice, utilization management, and psychiatric crisis stabilization. Dr. Hussein serves as Vice Chair of the Teaching Section/Executive Committee at the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) and as a peer reviewer for the National Science Foundation. Her research focuses on anti-oppressive and empowerment models, social-emotional predictive models, mentoring for early-stage faculty, and experiential learning to connect research, practice, and policy. Dr. Hussein is an Associate Professor of teaching at Rutgers School of Social Work. She earned her EdD in Educational Leadership from East Stroudsburg University, MSW from Rutgers, and BA in Journalism/Media Studies and Social Work. Her leadership has been recognized by the US Senate and General Assembly.

Mr. Angel Emmanuel Jaimes-Valdez, a proud Chicano born in Bull City (Durham, NC), earned his BA in Political Science from NCCU (2024), where he is now pursuing an MPA, with plans to pursue a doctorate. At NCCU, he has been deeply involved in student life, serving as Treasurer of Raíces (now the Latine Student Organization), member of the Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA), and Co-Founder and

current President of NCCU's Catholic Student Ministry. Beyond campus, Mr. Jaimes-Valdez has worked with the North Carolina Democratic Hispanic Caucus (2024 presidential election), NC Congress of Latino Organizations (NCCLO) listening circles, and interned at Durham Public Schools' Multilingual Resource Center. He continues to engage in grassroots voter registration. His experiences working with diverse local leaders continue to fuel his public service motivation. He is committed to advancing community engagement, amplifying marginalized voices, and fostering civic empowerment. He aspires to run for local or state office in North Carolina to advocate for his community and advance La Causa.

Ms. Alli Joseph is a seasoned journalist, content producer, documentary filmmaker, and family historian with extensive creative agency experience. She has served as a contributing senior editor and supervising producer for Salon.com and worked with NBC, CBS News, VH1, Time Inc., and Food Network. A McCormick Tribune Foundation Fellow, Poynter Institute Fellow, and consulting faculty member with the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, Alli teaches entrepreneurial journalism from primary through postgraduate levels. She is Chair of the Council of Advisors for the Association on American Indian Affairs and produced the PBS documentary CONSCIENCE POINT (Independent Lens). A citizen of the Shinnecock Indian Nation and a native New Yorker, Alli is pursuing her Master of Social Work (MSW) at Seton Hall University, holds an executive media management certificate from Northwestern University (Medill/Kellogg), and is a Vassar College alum. Through *The RIOS (Reflexive, Innovative Objective Research for Social Justice) Laboratory (Lab)*, she is further developing research to support Indigenous community mental and physical health care.

Dr. Hillary J. Knepper spent 20 years working for nonprofits and local governments, where she worked primarily in access to services for vulnerable populations, facilitating collaborations, program evaluation, and board governance. She now teaches healthcare management, policy & public administration courses at Pace University. She is the current District 1 National Council Representative to the American Society for Public Administration (2024–2027) and a founding board member for the Northeast Conference on Public Administration. Dr. Knepper is an active member and past chair for the Section for Women in Public Administration at ASPA, and Academic Women in Public Administration. Her research focuses on system-level change, how public policies influence outcomes, and the implications of how relationships across sectors affect services. She is the Co-Editor-in-Chief for the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration (JSEPA)*. Her recent scholarship appears in *Public Administration Review*, *Administrative*

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Dr. Claire Connolly Knox, PhD, is a Professor in the School of Public Administration at the University of Central Florida and holds a joint appointment with the National Center for Integrated Coastal Research. She was the Founding Director of UCF's Master of Emergency and Crisis Management Program, which is ranked #3 in the nation. Dr. Knox is an expert in environmental vulnerability and disaster response, coastal resilience, critical theory, and cultural competency. Dr. Knox's co-edited book, *Cultural Competency for Emergency and Crisis Management: Concepts, Theories and Case Studies*, won 2021 Book of the Year Award from ASPA's Section on Democracy and Social Justice. She has obtained nearly \$5 million in grants and serves as Associate Editor of *Natural Hazards Review* and the *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*. She has received multiple awards for research, teaching, and service, including the 2022 Kay C. Goss for Innovation in Emergency Management Award at FEMA's Higher Education Symposium. Dr. Knox identifies as American, first generation college graduate of Cajun French heritage.

Ms. Danielle "Dannie" Kyle holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of Illinois at Springfield. She is experienced engaging communities across multiple nonprofits, state agencies, as well as a handful of state and local political campaigns. In her spare time, Dannie cares for two pigeons, studies classical voice, and frequents museums.

Dr. Ángel Luis Molina, Jr. is a political scientist interested in the institutional, social, and policy mechanisms that shape local governance in minority communities. Spanning the fields of public administration and political science, much of his published research focuses on various aspects of representation, diversity, and inclusion with a focus on Latino communities. He is also engaged in a variety of activities that are designed to help create a more inclusive ASU community. Dr. Molina holds an undergraduate degree in Finance and an MS in Economics from the University of Texas at El Paso, and a PhD in Political Science from Texas A&M University. He is a proud product of El Paso, Texas.

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Mr. Jason R. Piscia is an Associate Professor and the Director of the Public Affairs Reporting (PAR) Program at the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS), as well as a 1998 PAR graduate who came to UIS in 2019 following a 21-year career at *The State Journal-Register* (SJ-R). After completing his PAR internship with the SJ-R, the newspaper hired him as a general assignment reporter. He also covered higher education, business and city government before becoming the newspaper's first-ever online editor, in charge of managing the SJ-R's website. Piscia was then promoted to digital managing editor, directing coverage and overseeing production for both the SJ-R digital and print editions. Under his direction, the SJ-R's website won numerous awards for excellence from the Illinois Press Association and Illinois Associated Press Media Editors. In his role at the SJ-R, Piscia has helped to mentor and ultimately hire several Public Affairs Reporting Program alumni. A native of Peru, Illinois, Piscia holds a bachelor's degree in mass communication from Illinois State University, where he was a reporter and editor for the student newspaper, *The Vidette*.

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Mr. Zach Ridder is a long-time resident of Tennessee, residing in the municipality of Hixson. Both a current student and an alumnus of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC), Zack has earned undergraduate degrees in History and Economics, graduate degrees and certificates in Business Administration, Public Administration, and Nonprofit Management, and is currently an all but dissertation PhD candidate in Leadership and Decision-Making. Zack is an Academic Advisor at the UTC in the College of Engineering and Computer Science. Previously, he has also worked with incoming freshmen students in the Center for Academic Support and Advisement, and in the Office of the University Registrar. Additionally, he joined the board of Scenic City Clay Arts (SCCA) in Chattanooga to learn more about the nonprofit sector. Zack found he enjoyed the work so much that he stayed on the board for 5 years, 2 of which he served as board president, and he remains deeply interested in furthering the work of nonprofits in his area. Currently, Zack remains in the nonprofit world as the recording secretary and membership management committee chair for the Friends of the Cherokee National Forest.

Dr. Juan A. Rios is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and full-time faculty member at Seton Hall University, where he previously served as Director of the Master of Social Work program. He holds a Doctorate in Social Work and MSW from Rutgers University, and a BSW from Southern Connecticut State University. He also holds certifications in nonprofit leadership, sex offender treatment, hypnotherapy, EMDR, TEAM CBT, and is a Mental Health First Aid Instructor. Dr. Rios's engaged scholarship focuses on trauma narratives of Latinx migrant women, mindfulness with undocumented children, and international interventions with migrant youth. He

has published widely on holistic classroom interventions, migration trauma, masculinity, and mental health in policing. His work has reached national audiences and informed public discourse on wellness and justice. Dr. Rios has also served as a research fellow at Rutgers' Huamin China Foundation and has presented nationally and internationally on trauma, social justice, and philanthropy. He identifies as Panamanian and Puerto Rican, Afro-Latino, Black, cis-het, immigrant, neurodivergent trauma survivor.

Dr. Jason D. Rivera is Chair of the Department of Public Management and affiliated faculty in the M.S. in Emergency Management program at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. His research examines the intersection of public administration, emergency management, and social equity. He earned his PhD in Public Affairs from Rutgers University-Camden, specializing in community development. Dr. Rivera's work advocates for inclusive disaster planning and governance processes within emergency management and public administration. His research is published in *Public Administration Review*, *State and Local Government Review*, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, and *Natural Hazards Review*, among others. His awards include the Lavern Burchfield Award (2024), William Petak Award (2024, 2019, 2017), SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creativity (2020), and The Stanford M. Lyman Distinguished Book Award (2008). Dr. Rivera chairs ASPA's Section for Emergency and Crisis Management (SECM), serves on NASPAA's Emergency Management Executive Board, and is a Fulbright Specialist. He identifies as Puerto Rican.

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Dr. David Topel has worked in policy and applied institutional research in Higher Education and in applied criminal justice research. He has taught

courses in criminology, criminal justice and public management at John Jay College and San Diego State University. He holds a PhD in Criminal Justice from The Graduate Center and John Jay College of CUNY. Previously he completed a Bachelor of Law (LLB) at Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas Venezuela, and an MA in Government and Security Studies from the IDC-Herzliya in Israel. Dr. Topel identifies as Venezuelan.

Mr. Emiliano Vera is from Bushnell, Illinois, USA and Puebla (City), Puebla (State), Mexico, with ten years of experience in multilingual education and community organizing. As a Rotary exchange student in Thailand, they volunteered to tutor students in English. While studying at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, they worked with first generation students from Caribbean countries and Latin America in the America Reads program for four years as an English tutor. They also volunteered for the Fabretto Foundation in Nicaragua and studied Chinese at Beijing University, before graduating with a Bachelor's in Education and Social Policy with minors in Sociology and Chinese Language and Culture. During that time, they began community organizing with the IIRON Student Network, and then volunteered with voter outreach in the 2015 presidential primaries and Chicago municipal elections focusing on Spanish-speaking voter outreach, along with several elections since. After graduating, they continued their education with a Master's in Governance and Globalization from the Universidad de las Américas Puebla in Cholula, Mexico. In the meanwhile, Emiliano taught high school English and History at the Preparatoria UPAEP Santiago. Later, they moved back to Bushnell and ran first for County Board and then State Representative, creating unprecedented Spanish and French language outreach programs. After these elections, they taught in their local school district as a full-time substitute teacher. Emiliano is pursuing a doctorate in Economic Development while organizing Spanish speakers through the Poor People's Campaign. In their free time, they like to hike, play video games, practice Mandarin, and spend time with their cat Cezy and dog Xaza.

Mr. Hongy “Bruce” Yu is a candidate for the MSU program at New York University's (NYU) Silver School of Social Work. He completed his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from Michigan State University (MSU), where he also worked as an undergraduate teaching assistant in the Psychology department. Upon graduation from MSU, Bruce enrolled in the NYU New York-Shanghai Program and accepted his clinical training as a clinical Social Worker Intern at United Family Hospital during his first year in Shanghai. After moving to New York, Bruce shifted his focus to the macro perspective of social work and is currently serving as an administrator and research assistant in public policy research at Rio's lab.

PREFACE

Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities builds upon and deepens the important conversations initiated during the first bilingual (Spanish-English) special session at the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA) 2022 Social Equity Leadership Conference (#SELC2022), hosted by the Masagung Graduate School of Management at the University of San Francisco and co-chaired by Richard Gregory Johnson III, Agatha Swift Caraballo, and José Luis Irizarry.

This project has been in the works for almost three years, during which a lot may have changed. At the time of publication of this volume, a recording of this session was publicly available on YouTube, hosted by the Maurice A. Ferré Institute for Civic Leadership (@fiuferre) at Florida International University (FIU): <https://youtu.be/Jn9HdpModbg?si=ywVuX9fF5oqBC8Cw>.

This edited volume expands the themes of the groundbreaking bilingual panel, focusing on the lived experiences and systemic challenges faced by Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. It examines how social equity in public administration is shaped by barriers such as language, culture, generational divides, and access to technology. It also highlights innovations—from both academic research and frontline practice—that are advancing more equitable and inclusive public service delivery and civic engagement.

In honor of the pioneering spirit of the #SELC2022 session, and to preserve its legacy, selected program excerpts are included as an appendix in this volume.

Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities is a call to action and a roadmap for how we can continue to “walk the talk” of social equity, inclusion, representation, justice, ethical public service, and intersectionality. It represents only the beginning of an ongoing dialogue—one that seeks to illuminate the challenges, elevate community voices, and inspire the development of more inclusive democratic practices. Our shared goal is to empower civic participation, nurture ethical

and engaged civic citizenship, and support individuals in becoming social equity champions within their communities for *all* communities.

This book is intended for a wide and diverse audience: faculty, students, researchers, and public service professionals in all forms. While the chapters collectively offer a comprehensive exploration of key issues, each contribution stands on its own—providing readers the flexibility to engage with topics in any order based on their interests and needs.

José Luis Irizarry, PhD

BOOK ABSTRACT

Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities explores how language, identity, and structural inequities shape the civic and democratic experiences of Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. Born from the first-ever bilingual panel at the National Academy of Public Administration's 2022 Social Equity Leadership Conference, this interdisciplinary volume bridges theory and practice to examine how public systems can either advance or obstruct linguistic justice, civic participation, and social equity. Organized into four thematic parts—foundations; communication and media; governance challenges; and pedagogical innovations—the book analyzes demographic shifts, symbolic and practical dimensions of multilingual service delivery, and the systemic barriers that hinder inclusion in public and nonprofit sectors. Through theoretical analysis, case studies, and lived testimony, contributors call for a transformative equity-centered praxis that empowers participation, disrupts exclusion, and builds inclusive institutions for all. The appendices offer reflexive, student-centered assignments and institutional models that foster civic agency, and inclusive & equity-based learning. This timely volume calls on public servants, educators, and civic leaders to reimagine engagement with Spanish-speaking communities—not as a matter of translation alone, but as a democratic imperative rooted in justice, representation, and belonging.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Life has taught me that we must learn to realize, understand, and appreciate that we stand on the shoulders of giants. None of us would be where we are without those that came before us, those that lift us up, those that stand beside us, and those that will follow. Accordingly, I would like to briefly acknowledge many of the people that have supported me in my personal, academic, and professional life, and those that made this project possible.

First and foremost, I am truly indebted to and inspired by all the phenomenal contributors to this volume. Congratulations to all those who accepted working on this project while students, many of whom have since or will soon earn their graduate/doctoral degrees, as well as to all the contributors who have since earned tenure, promotions, and/or distinguished statuses.

Second, many thanks to Dr. Richard Gregory Johnson III as this project's Series Editor, and Chair of the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA's) 2022 Social Equity Leadership Conference (SELC) for recognizing the issues of the day and empowering his Conference Co-Chairs, Dr. Agatha Swift Caraballo and myself. He fostered and enabled us to host the SELC's first ever bilingual (Spanish-English) special session: *Language and Social Equity Challenges: Fostering Diverse and Inclusive Democratic Participation*. Accordingly, I also want to thank Dr. Caraballo, the Conference Planning Committee, and the participants of the bilingual panel: Dr. Diana Oliva Aroche, Dr. Lucía Vazquez, Julio Barrenzuela, and Sergio Talavera. This panel is at the heart of this edited volume.

Third, I am eternally grateful to my mentors and the many individuals who have supported me throughout the years, including Dr. Jeanne Marie Col, Dr. Michelle D. Evans, Dr. Hillary J. Knepper, Dr. Seth J. Meyer, Dr. RaJade M. Berry-James, & Dr. Jason David Rivera. Special thanks to Dr. Berry-James, whose tireless efforts went above and beyond to help make the #SELC2022 the success that it was including my leading the effort to host NAPA's first bilingual panel at the SELC. Special thanks also go out to Dr. Evans for her unwavering support, patience, and invaluable contributions

to this volume and my holistic development as public service scholar and professional. Not only did she directly contribute to several of the chapters presented here, but she also played a vital role behind the scenes in countless ways. This volume is far more meaningful because of her mentorship, guidance, and immeasurable impact.

Fourth, I also need to thank members of my #EagleNest at North Carolina Central University (NCCU) for supporting me as I transitioned to NCCU during the darkest moments of life. Many thanks to Dr. Christopher J. Paul (a true angel), Dr. Zaphon R. Wilson, Dr. S. Nicole Diggs, Dr. Evelyn Rodriguez-Plesa, & Mrs. Doris Woods. I am also grateful to the support I received from the faculty learning communities of the Office of Faculty Professional Development (OFPD) and the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CASH) at NCCU with special thanks to Dr. Laurell C. Malone and Dr. Shauntae Brown White.

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INTRODUCTION

José Luis Irizarry
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ABSTRACT

The Introduction to this volume situates the work in this edited volume within the context of social equity, public administration, and civic engagement among Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. It highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic disparities in access to linguistically and culturally appropriate services and information, and it introduces key themes explored throughout the volume including identity, language, representation, and structural inequities. This edited volume calls for equity-centered governance and culturally competent public service, arguing that inclusive civic engagement must move beyond procedural access to include meaningful participation. This introduction contains key features such as Innovations in Action and Inequity in Action boxes. Together with Chapters 1 and 2, this introduction presents the foundations for the volume, setting the stage for deeper discussions on representation, language justice, and democratic inclusion across sectors and systems in the fulfillment of Public Administration's social equity pillar.

Keywords: Language justice; representation; inclusive governance; cultural competency; social equity; civic participation

Social equity is about fairness, right, justice, and freedom from the effects of bias. Its reach is broad and its dimensions are many, requiring equitable management of all institutions

... serving the public. ... In today's parlance, it is an activist notion that requires government to be a lever for change, and it joins efficiency, economy, and effectiveness, as the fourth pillar upon which public administration rests. (McCandless & Guy, 2020, p. 1)

Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities contributes to the ongoing discussions stemming from the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA) 12 grand challenges in public administration, particularly the grand challenge "To Foster Social Equity" (NAPA, n.d.). The goal of this edited volume is consistent with NAPA's (n.d.) in that contributors want to help "public administrators and policymakers ... develop a broader understanding of the elements and implications of social equity" for Spanish-speaking communities in the United States.

This edited volume continues building upon the issues, challenges, and opportunities addressed during the panel "Language and Social Equity Challenges: Fostering Diverse and Inclusive Democratic Participation"—the first ever bilingual (Spanish-English) panel of NAPA's Social Equity Leadership Conference (SELC) in June 2022 (see Appendix D)—delving deeper into explorations of social equity, citizen engagement, and civic engagement in multiple contexts including in the social construction of [American] identity and language in the public sphere (Irizarry et al., 2025), nonprofits and civil society (Evans, 2025); news (Piscia, 2025); social media (Davis et al., 2025); local government engagement (Camarena et al., 2025); health and human service delivery (Alvarez-Hernandez et al., 2025); homelessness (Moore & Knepper, 2025); interactions with police agencies in the United States (Topel & Colvin, 2025); immigration, law, social (in)equity, and the immigration-crime-nexus (Caraballo et al., 2025); civic engagement, democracies, voting, and political systems (Vera, 2025); equitable access to crisis information (Haupt et al., 2025), and looking forward in the space of public administration, civic engagement, and Spanish-speaking communities (Irizarry, 2025a). To assist readers in multiple learning places and spaces, three appendices provide teaching resources and models addressing activities looking at implicit bias and social equity (Irizarry, 2025b), mindfulness-based social equity learning utilizing multimedia approaches (Irizarry, 2025c), as well as an Equity Model for Inclusion in Research that fosters academic engagement through the RIOS Laboratory (Rios et al., 2025).

IMPETUS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND SPANISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

The experience of Latinos/as, particularly Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, is one of struggle, conquest and the ramifications of conquest. Both populations endured a

double conquest, an early conquest and governance by the Spanish, followed by conquest and governance by the United States. Both conquests continue to exert powerful influence on American life.

We are taught little about the conquest of Mexico, and the later invasion of Puerto Rico. The relative lack of widely disseminated knowledge about the history of Latino people in the United States contrasts with our much greater knowledge of the experience of African Americans. ... [A]s inadequate as our knowledge of African Americans may be, that knowledge far exceeds public knowledge and recognition of the history of Latinos in the United States. Readers should ask themselves why this is so. Is there anything inherent in conquest that produces this result? (Perea et al., 2000, p. 246)

The #SELC2022 session, “Bilingual (Spanish-English) Special Session: Language and Social Equity Challenges: Fostering Diverse and Inclusive Democratic Participation” came about in response to events during the COVID-19 pandemic where for many, innumerable inequities and injustices were compounded and magnified. In many ways, “the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as the great revealer of the social determinants of health that impede people of color from economic, physical, and emotional health and well-being” (Keegan et al., 2023, p. 34). This is especially true for members of Spanish-speaking communities—as evidenced by pandemic and vaccination disinformation efforts and lack of reliable information sources in Spanish for Spanish-speaking communities. Penetrating the disinformation bubble remains a daunting task, but much can be learned by examining previous crises, emergencies, and disasters, and by exploring and understanding innovative strategies from those providing public services at the frontlines within and to Spanish-speaking (and other) communities. An excellent example of this is *See Me!: Gay and Trans Latinos’ Testimonios on Mental Health, Discrimination, and Joy in South Texas* (Alvarez-Hernandez, 2025) that presents testimonies or *testimonios* from *testimoniadores*—the “brave people willing to tell the world the harm they have experienced and witnessed” and “who want to see changes in their communities” (p. xiv).

Undergirding the #SELC2022 bilingual panel and *Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities* is the reality that: 1) for many trained in public administration and public service more broadly, training is completed in English, 2) the dominant arenas and venues for participation are governed by and in many cases restricted to English, and 3) hegemonic dominance makes it difficult to train public servants to work in and with Spanish-speaking communities (and other language communities). With the ever-growing diversification of societies across the globe, and in particular in the United

States, ideally, public administration and public service programs more broadly, along with the various public service professions and networks of associations and professional groups, should help develop the next generation of public servants with the universal competencies necessary to work within and engage a diverse public. In the context of Spanish-speaking communities, this entails helping the next generation develop the language skills, cultural awareness and competency, and comfortability to tackle social equity issues head on, in English and/or Spanish with a more comprehensive understanding of how social equity issues are experienced by members of the communities being served.

One does not need to identify as a member of a particular social identity or group to advocate for social equity for particular identity groups. This is critically important for creating and delivering quality, empathetic, accessible, ethical, and meaningfully effective public services to those underserved. Spanish-speaking communities continue to be underserved even when as of the 2022 census about 19% of the population in the United States were identified as “Hispanic” with a total of 63.7 million individuals (Lopez et al., 2023).

Among the many steps we must take to address the needs of underserved communities, the most essential is creating inclusive spaces where individuals feel a true sense of belonging. This foundational act ensures that public service policies, programs, and activities are shaped through their direct participation, aligning with their lived experiences, perspectives, and authentic needs—ultimately honoring their individual and collective humanity, and upholding their rights to self-determination, dignity, and autonomy. Public services created and directed by actors so far removed who think they know what such communities need or who think they know what is best for such communities isn’t consistent with our public service values and will likely only continue to engender more exclusion, distrust, and division. Throughout the public service profession, we can start by creating the spaces necessary in places like the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), and the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). ASPA’s establishment of the Section on Hispanic, Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Public Administration (SCHLACIPA) is a significant step forward for the profession—but it must be seen as a beginning, not an endpoint (see Innovations in Action Box below). Continued efforts are essential to fully support and elevate the voices and contributions of these communities within public administration.

Innovations in Action: ASPA Creates Arena for Spanish-Speaking Communities

Unfortunately, few arenas in mainstream public administration exist to address social equity issues and Spanish-speaking communities—even less existed during #SELC2022 and shortly thereafter when this edited volume was conceived. In fact, the premier professional association of the public administration discipline—the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)—failed to provide this space. While ASPA had sections focused on African, Chinese, Korean, and South Asian public administration, no sections or similar communities formally existed that was specific to countries where Spanish was their official language or of Spanish-speaking communities within the United States (ASPA, 2022).

A welcomed and long-overdue development took place at ASPA’s 2024 Annual Conference with the launch of the Section on Hispanic, Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Public Administration (SCHLACIPA)—signaling meaningful progress toward greater inclusivity in the field. SCHLACIPA’s inaugural leadership included Abraham David Benavides (Chair), Christina Medina (Chair-Elect), Edgar Ramirez de La Cruz (Secretary), and Palmira Ríos (Treasurer). At its first annual meeting during ASPA’s 2025 Conference in Washington, D.C., the section reflected on the long-standing efforts that led to its creation. Attendees shared the history behind SCHLACIPA’s formation, honoring the sustained advocacy of many contributors—including the founding leadership, ASPA’s 2023–2025 President, Patria de Lancer Julnes, and others. Such progress is the result of years of dedicated work; it does not happen overnight.

In the mainstream social equity literature in public administration, there is a lack of representation of Spanish-speaking voices and of front-line public servants working with Spanish-speaking communities (and this book brings many of those voices and perspectives into the conversation). This may be because lessons learned are not easily translated into manageable and actionable steps to foster and enhance social equity in public administration. The dearth of understanding about cultural and linguistic differences, and increasingly lack of trust in government, exacerbates these social equity challenges. In local emergencies, this is evidenced in the effectiveness of getting lifesaving information to local residents such as evacuation orders and shelter information during hurricanes like Maria and Irma (see Haupt et al., 2025), but these issues are also evidenced in other areas such as criminal justice (see Caraballo et al., 2025; Topel & Colvin, 2025), health care (see Alvarez-Hernandez et al., 2025), homelessness (see Moore & Knepper, 2025) and a host of other areas throughout civil society (see Camarena et al., 2025; Evans, 2025; Piscia, 2025; Rios et al., 2025). Additional wide-ranging activities and actions taken in 2025 by the Chief Executive of the United States also seem to significantly impact Spanish-speaking communities, as well as a host of marginalized and minoritized communities, such as the removing and disappearing of documented and undocumented immigrants and migrants (Abramsky, 2025) and efforts to scrub people from government websites with one report noting that “across

the federal government, agencies have been busy scrubbing photographic and written references about women, people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community from their websites” (Jingnan & Lawrence, 2025). The consequences of such actions, and their intended chilling effects, exponentially impact members with multiple intersecting identities in ways that are not additive but that are multiplicative.

Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities elucidates issues, their contexts, and brings in voices and insights often left out of dominant conversations about social equity, diversity, inclusion, ethical practice, civic engagement, and democracy more broadly for the 22nd century (e.g. Alvarez-Hernandez, 2025; Blessett et al., 2019; Knepper et al., 2023; McCandless & Guy, 2020). As a model of social equity, diversity, inclusion, and representation this edited volume was designed with an intentional contributor selection strategy to address major contemporary topics, issues, and perspectives. Most chapters were set up to be composed of teams of contributors including students, practitioners, and junior, mid-level, and senior faculty with voices from Spanish-speaking communities as well as allies, advocates, and social equity champions. This design intentionally included representation from all career levels, sectors, and multiple disciplines and intersectional identities in ways that also fostered a cross pollination of learning and mentoring.

The resulting volume, *Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities* is composed of 13 chapters (including the introduction and conclusion) and four appendices (innovative applications, case studies, teaching tools, and #SELC2022 Conference Program excerpts) with a combined total of 31 contributors representing multiple intersectional identities (White, Black, Puerto Rican, American, Mexican, Colombian, Cajun French, Chicana/o, Panamanian, Afro-Latino, neurodivergent, multiple sexual orientations and gender identities, religions, etc.) and academic disciplines (public administration, criminal justice, social work, political science, educational leadership, psychology, communication and media, and others). With this design strategy, *Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities* is well poised to achieve its goal of contributing to the development of meaningful, diverse, and inclusive democratic participation that fosters and involves transformative civic engagement, responsible and ethical citizenship behaviors, and the ability of our community members to be social equity warriors and champions.

Accordingly, *Public Administration, Civic Engagement, and Spanish-Speaking Communities* is a resource for all types of audiences and readers, especially faculty, students, and public service professionals/practitioners (broadly conceptualized). While readers are encouraged to read the entire volume for the most comprehensive coverage of topics, this edited volume is designed so that audiences can read selected chapters in any order as each

is an independent contribution emphasizing a particular aspect of public administration, civic engagement, and Spanish-speaking communities.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL EQUITY FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

As a direct product of colonialism, Whiteness is a global phenomenon, but whose specific forms and mechanisms are contextually bounded within the modern national state and the sociohistorical processes of creation of national racial regimes. ... The reproduction of Whiteness and White supremacy in public service is at odds with the fairness and justice ideals of social equity, as a pillar of public administration. (Blanco, 2024, p. 125)

As noted in this chapter’s opening quote, “social equity is about fairness, right, justice, and freedom from the effects of bias. ... In today’s parlance, it is an activist notion that requires government to be a lever for change” (McCandless & Guy, 2020, p. 1). While this is a good foundation for understanding social equity, it isn’t necessarily specific enough to address the complexities and nuances of the concept when applied to specific issues and groups of people. I am of the belief that no singular definition of social equity could ever be specific enough to encapsulate the multidimensional and intersectional complexities of various contexts of social equity to be used as a universal definition. Further, even if such a definition did exist, how helpful would it be to the practice of public service outside of academia? Accordingly, the majority of chapters in this volume provide specific definitions, conceptualizations, and understandings of social equity specific to their topic of investigation, explaining what the concept means, how it should be defined, and how the concept can be made actionable and applicable to praxis of public service. For instance, below are two examples from chapters in this volume:

- *Social Equity in the Context of Social Media*: “Social equity for social media and Spanish-speaking communities would ensure procedural fairness and representativeness in the processes by which platforms are utilized to convey content specifically created to address the needs of Spanish-speaking communities where all in this community would have opportunities to engage and be able to participate in ways beyond what’s considered bare minimum, thereby leading to outcomes that foster diverse and inclusive democratic participation in being recipients, creators, and/or users of social media content and their platforms” (Davis et al., 2025, pp. 111–112).
- *Social Equity in the Context of Wealth and Human Services*: “the guarantee of a clear pathway for communities to access high quality holistic services that continuously ensures their human rights, wellbeing, dignity,

and uniqueness by eliminating systemic barriers to ongoing communication, accessibility, and service delivery resulting in communities having improved access to continuous and comprehensive health and human services that consider not only physical health but also mental and social well-being” (Alvarez-Hernandez et al., 2025, p. 155).

Throughout this volume, social equity is largely examined in terms of the four main criteria proposed by McCandless and Guy (2020), procedural fairness, access, quality, and outcomes where:

- *fairness* emphasizes ethical, representative, just, transparent, and accountable process over outcomes;
- *access* emphasizes both opportunities and ability of individuals, especially of minoritized and marginalized people and communities throughout the various processes and programs designed to serve the public;
- *quality* emphasizes going beyond bare minimums and ensuring that the features, characteristics, conditions, and caliber of processes, programs, and services are not just minimally acceptable but respectful of human dignity, provided with at least the same investment of resources as would be committed and expended for the best of us in society, and thereby desirable and competitive; and
- *outcomes* emphasize that the first three criteria have been applied and enforced throughout the processes, programs, and services, but also that they were realized in the impacts of those processes, programs, and services thereby addressing explicit and implicit biases and inequities, as well as determining if and mitigating against unintended and unforeseeable inequities that may result because as we know, solutions to specific problems may impact other areas and may cause inequities in other areas as result in new problems.

Several chapters elaborate and expand on these criteria like the chapter, “A Study of Equitable Access to Crisis Information for Latino Populations” (Haupt et al., 2025) that addresses additional elements in the context of equitable access to crisis information and crisis information strategies including accessibility, accommodation, adequacy, affordability, availability, and awareness.

CONSIDERATIONS OF COMPLEXITIES AND NUANCES AS READERS ENGAGE THIS EDITED VOLUME

While engaging the topic of public administration, civic engagement, and Spanish-speaking communities, and reviewing the chapters in this edited volume, there are a number of complexities and nuances that should be reflexively considered.