

APAP | MetLife Foundation Case Study
Increasing Arts Access in Underserved Communities

**INQUILINOS BORICUAS EN ACCIÓN (IBA)
VILLA VICTORIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS**
(formerly Casa de La Cultura/Center for Latino Arts)

Boston, MA

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Take Note

- The Villa Victoria Center for the Arts works to offer affordable (often no-cost), accessible and culturally-relevant, neighborhood programming to underserved Bostonians, while creating cross-cultural arts projects that break down barriers and foster inter-cultural understanding within diverse ethnic groups.
- Partnerships with Berklee College of Music, Boston Center for the Arts, Emerson College, the Museum of Fine Arts allow Villa Victoria to provide sequential instruction that empowers youth to master artistic skills and develop self-confidence by showcasing their work at public concerts, plays and art exhibits.

Overview

The Villa Victoria Center for the Arts, recently named a National Finalist for the Ford Foundation and LINC's Artography: Arts in a Changing America, is a program of Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion (IBA), a dynamic community building agency in Boston's South End. Villa Victoria, the largest and most significant Latino Cultural Center in New England, preserves and promotes Latino art by conveying the vitality of Latino cultural expressions through high quality, affordable and accessible performances, extensive youth arts education and visual arts exhibits.

Accessibility is at the core of the mission and programming. The organization focuses on removing barriers so that those too frequently excluded from Boston's cultural attractions can experience the arts as a life affirming, community-centered and individually transformative medium.

Villa Victoria's target population is

- The 1100 residents of Villa Victoria, a predominately Latino affordable-housing community, where 80% of residents live below the national poverty level.
- The New England Latino community, which has experienced exponential (61%) growth over the decade.
- Low-income South End/Lower Roxbury neighborhood youth.

Commitment

Strategic Concepts

To continue to promote accessibility and grow audiences, Villa Victoria has:

- Collaborated with consulates and community groups from various Latin-American countries (Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Argentina), as well as universities and arts organizations in order to develop new audiences.
- Developed new branding and audience development strategies, through a partnership with Geovision, a Latino-owned, award-winning multicultural marketing firm.
- Connected with regional tourism, arts promotion, business and neighborhood organizations to get on the radar screen of Greater Boston's broader arts scene and specific Latino communities.
- Hosted organizational nights for groups with large memberships, such as the Latino Professional Network, hoping to develop special connections.
- Established partnerships with universities, larger arts organizations, consulates and community organizations, encouraging cross-promotion.
- Developed future audiences through arts education, exposure to frequent in-house productions, and partner's performances and art events.

Effective Practices

Community Engagement

- The Villa Victoria Center works with neighborhood residents and a community-controlled board to coordinate involvement with planning, promotion, and fundraising for events.
- The Betances Festival incorporates performances by members of the community, including a parade and youth performances, to ensure the participation and enjoyment of all in the neighborhood.
- To increase youth participation, youth leaders recruit peers and organize arts events.

Implementation

Specific projects implemented to improve access for underserved communities include:

- Café Teatro: For 18 years, Café Teatro has presented local, national and international Latino artists, from folkloric to avant-garde styles, with many Boston and U.S. premieres. Tickets, usually \$15-\$20, are offered for free to Villa Victoria residents. Fourteen annual productions include performances, residencies, workshops, symposiums and school matinees by socially significant and artistically outstanding Latino artists.
- Festival Betances: New England's oldest Latino folk arts celebration draws 5,000 attendees and features four days of free outdoor performances, family and youth activities and traditional cuisine.
- The Cacique Youth Arts Initiative, a youth arts and music education program, develops concrete art skills through core programming in Latin percussion, theater, poetry, dance, digital and visual arts, buttressed by social-justice workshops.

Evaluation

The Villa Victoria Center solicits input from neighborhood residents and a community-controlled board. The community-controlled board provides guidance and feedback to staff.

Challenges

As the population of the community has changed, the Center has to be responsive to the change in demographics without forgetting its Puerto Rican heritage.

Villa Victoria attempts to keep art in students' lives after area schools cut arts programs because of budget constraints. In addition to visual arts and dance, the Center offers classes in theatre, percussion, tobacco prevention and homework help.

Advice

Celebrate the differences of participants, and also the similarities. Through art they can see their common ground.



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