

El Centro, Inc.

Kansas City, Kansas

www.elcentroinc.com

Knowing who your customers are and what they need is a prerequisite to high quality customer service. El Centro, a community development corporation, found that current, locally relevant data on its customers was scarce. It set out to fill that information gap. “For the past four years, we have conducted a comprehensive survey of Latino immigrants in the Kansas City area,” explains Vanessa Vaughn, Director of Communications at El Centro. “We ask our customers: What brought you here? What challenges do you face? What services do you want? What are your hopes and dreams?”

The survey results provide a rich data set on El Centro’s customers including information on: demographics, employment, education, health, taxes, future plans for themselves and their

children, and more. “In the past,” says Vaughn, “we were just guessing what the community needs were. Now, we can quantify the gravity of conditions in which our clients are living and their needs for jobs and education. This lends credence to our policy efforts, especially when making the case to legislators.”

Information from the surveys has changed how El Centro does its own work, such as adding more English as a second language classes and computer training, at locations and times most convenient to its customers. The survey also confirmed that many Kansas City Latinos lack relationships with banks and other financial institutions—making bill paying cumbersome and expensive, and loans

hard to secure. To address this problem, El Centro organizes *Ferias de Finanzas* (financial fairs)—in partnership with the FDIC, area banks, and volunteer help—to provide financial information and demystify the process of setting up a bank account.

El Centro conducts its customer survey annually and has four years of data so it can document trends over time—such as the increase in the number of respondents who have bank accounts, which has grown from 28% to over 50%.

Heron provides general support funding for El Centro’s comprehensive community development efforts including home ownership, enterprise development and affordable, accredited child care.

