

WI CAN CASE STUDY: WI ECOLATINOS GREEN BUSINESS PROGRAM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Wisconsin EcoLatinos is an environmental nonprofit organization in Wisconsin working to increase equity and participation in environmental sustainability and conservation by empowering Latino communities through education and leadership development. They developed their Green Business program to meet the needs of small businesses that want to reduce their environmental footprint but don't have the resources of larger businesses to develop sustainability practices. The Green Business program helps small businesses customize a sustainability plan for their needs and obtain a Sustainability Business Certificate. The program helped a number of small businesses work toward sustainability, but it took time and effort to reach out to the Latino community and earn their trust. In order to scale up or replicate the effort, organizations need capacity, time, and funding to move forward.



As an organization by and for Latinos, [Wisconsin EcoLatinos](https://www.wisconsin ecolatinos.org/about) works to increase participation in environmental quality and conservation efforts by empowering Latino communities and others to take action against environmental hazards and reduce their carbon footprints. They pursue this work by eliminating language and social barriers while advocating for the inclusion of Latino communities in climate change adaptation and the transition to a clean energy economy.¹ The organization primarily works with Latino communities in south central Wisconsin, with a focus on Dane and Rock counties.

The Green Business program came about because Wisconsin EcoLatinos saw that while Latino small businesses may be interested in environmentally sustainable business practices, they often lack the resources to learn how to implement those practices. The Green Business program was designed to bridge that gap, providing an innovative solution by giving small businesses the same opportunities that larger ones have. Key program activities have involved helping businesses understand how sustainability can help their company, supplying a sustainability toolkit, and developing a

¹<https://www.wisconsin ecolatinos.org/about>

customized sustainability plan. Typical small businesses that benefit from the program include cleaning services, restaurants, food trucks, landscaping companies, and child care providers.

Project implementation happened in phases and started with one-on-one consultations with a small group of Latino businesses to learn more about how their organizations worked. Wisconsin EcoLatinos also gathered information at community events to learn more about perceptions of sustainability, working with the Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce, the Latino Academy of Workforce Development, and Forward Janesville's Spanish-language program Adelante Janesville to let businesses know these resources were available. They also used Spanish-language radio to reach Latino communities around Wisconsin.

To date, the Green Business program has supported a number of Latino small businesses in using the organization's sustainability toolkit and developing a sustainability plan. Several businesses, including a food truck, have implemented aspects of their plans, making changes that positively impact their community and environment. Progress has been hard-won because it requires time to build trusting relationships and help people understand the benefits of environmentally sustainable practices. In addition, some businesses have been unfamiliar with what sustainability means. In these cases, using the term "eco-friendly" has made the concept more accessible.

Another challenge has been connecting with new partners. While Wisconsin EcoLatinos has worked with other Latino partners such

as the Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce, it has sometimes been more difficult to connect with non-Latino partners who often have different priorities and perspectives and who don't necessarily work within Latino communities. The Wisconsin Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy's statewide climate action network WI CAN supported the project both by supplying the initial funding and also by providing a space where Wisconsin EcoLatinos could convene with other environmental organizations across the state, learn about what others were doing, make connections, get help promoting the project, and feel supported and strengthened in their work.

Wisconsin EcoLatinos' Green Business program has helped a number of small businesses work toward sustainability, but it took time and effort to reach out to the Latino community, create bilingual educational campaigns to communicate the value of sustainability to small businesses, and reduce the perception that sustainability implementation is unaffordable for them. In order to scale up or replicate the effort, a sustained outreach and education program is essential; organizations need capacity, time, and funding to move forward.



"The reality is that small businesses don't have these resources. Our goal was to bridge that gap and give these businesses the opportunity to learn how to implement sustainability."

Cristina Carvajal
Executive Director
Wisconsin EcoLatinos