



Arizona's Environmental Future Runs Through Its Latino Workforce

BY JOSHUA MOLINA

The heat reflecting off the asphalt hits differently in metro Phoenix. A short walk across a parking lot can feel like a trek across the Sahara. The steering wheel burns your hands. Afternoon plans suddenly seem optional.

Many of us manage by moving from an air-conditioned home to an air-conditioned car and then into an air-conditioned office. Thousands of Arizonans working on the front lines of our summer heat do not have that luxury.

They pour concrete, repair roofs, maintain landscapes, deliver packages and keep the systems running that allow the rest of us to live here. Many are Latino, and their work helps hold up Arizona's economy.

A peer-reviewed study by Arizona State University researchers identified 135 heat-vulnerable occupations representing 15% of the state's workforce. It also identified 110 "heat-solution" occupations that help Arizona prepare for and respond to extreme heat.

And there is a very Arizona twist: construction laborers, landscapers, electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, roofers and maintenance workers appear on both lists. The people sweating through the problem are often the same people we call to solve it.

The economic stakes are significant. By 2065, outdoor workers across Arizona could have nearly \$2.6 billion in total annual earnings at risk from extreme heat. In Maricopa County, the average outdoor worker could lose about \$5,000 a year and the equivalent of 41 workdays.



The Palabra Media team creates bilingual campaigns that help Arizona organizations connect with Latino and multicultural audiences.
Photos courtesy of Palabra Media

Those figures put a price on something Latino families have long understood: *cuando falta la salud, falta todo*. When health goes, everything else goes with it.

TURNING OPPORTUNITY INTO ACTION

There is a silver lining in this data. Preparing Arizona for a hotter future can also create good jobs. Nationally, Latino and Hispanic workers held nearly one-third of the new energy jobs created in 2023, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Arizona will need electricians, solar installers, HVAC technicians, engineers, emergency responders, community health workers and skilled tradespeople. It will also need educators, recruiters, small-business owners and communications professionals who can connect people with those opportunities.



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Palabra Media teaching Latino business owners and community organizations at Univision Arizona.

But there is a long road between saying something and making it real. A training program, job opening, rebate or safety resource accomplishes little if the families who could benefit never hear about it or cannot figure out how to apply.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED AT PALABRA MEDIA

Before becoming a marketer and agency owner, I was a journalist. The numbers above may be compelling, but experience has taught me that an important fact can still go nowhere. People pay attention when they recognize their neighborhood, their family and their own choices in the story. They listen when the messenger has earned their trust.

That lesson is central to the work we do at Palabra Media. We help organizations reach Arizona's Latino community through bilingual campaigns, video, public relations, advertising and trusted media partnerships. Much of our work involves helping clients cross the distance between "We posted it" and "Our community actually heard it."

Our team sometimes cringes at the campaigns we see directed toward Latino audiences. The Spanish copy looks like someone fed the English version through a translator five minutes before lunch. Important information is buried three clicks deep on a website. Advertising runs everywhere except the places where Latino families get their news. Then everyone wonders why the response was low.



Filming at Palabra Media event



Palabra Media produces culturally informed video and digital content for clients across healthcare, education, nonprofit, retail and public-service sectors.



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Joshua Molina, President and Chief Marketing Officer of Palabra Media, a Phoenix-based multicultural marketing agency.

Pónganse las pilas. We have to do better, especially when the message could connect someone to a safer workplace, a lower utility bill or a good job.

If Arizona wants to recruit Latino workers into clean-energy careers, show them the job, the paycheck, the training and someone who has already made the leap. Tell that story in English and Spanish through media and community organizations that have earned their trust.

Heat-safety information should reach the worker, the

supervisor, the small contractor and the family member who may recognize the warning signs first. If a rebate can help replace an old air conditioner, explain the application in plain language and make it easy to use.

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Arizona's Latino community should be involved while programs are designed, budgets are set and stories are told. Preferably before the *cafecito* is cold and the important decisions have already been made.



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Team filming in studio

Business and civic leaders can hire from the community, contract with Latino-owned firms and create paid pathways into skilled careers. They can budget for bilingual outreach from the beginning and measure who heard the message, who applied and who benefited.

At Palabra Media, our work begins with understanding people: how they speak, whom they trust, what they worry about and what gives them hope. Arizona's environmental future will depend on listening to the people already doing the work and giving them the tools, opportunities and voz to lead.

Hay que echarle ganas. In Arizona, we know how. ■

Joshua Molina is president and CMO of Palabra Media, one of Arizona's leading Hispanic and multicultural marketing agencies. A

former journalist and longtime advocate for the Hispanic community, he spent more than 15 years leading marketing teams for global technology companies before launching Palabra Media. Today, he helps organizations build trust with multicultural audiences and turn meaningful connections into measurable growth.

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