

# **Gateway to St. Louis: Exploring the drivers for attracting and retaining Work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants**

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## **Abstract**

This research explores socioeconomic factors influencing work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants' decisions to settle and remain in St. Louis. Utilizing qualitative interviews with participants, this study identifies key determinants of immigrant attraction and retention. By addressing the unique challenges and opportunities the Hispanic/Latino immigrant populations face, the study offers valuable insights for managing decision-making processes and promoting the vitality and prosperity of St. Louis and similar regions.

The study's theoretical framework integrates Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT), Social Network Analysis (SNA), and Human Capital Theory (HCT). The findings suggest that the region must pay more attention to promoting career and educational opportunities, as well as the quality of life and support network Hispanics/Latinos can find in the St. Louis region. Language barriers, housing, and decentralized communities must be addressed as the main challenges experienced by Hispanics/Latinos relocating to the St. Louis region.

## **Keywords**

immigration, Hispanic, Latinos, diversity, uniqueness, attraction, retention, work-authorized, belongingness, St. Louis

## Introduction

Attracting and retaining immigrants to St. Louis is challenging with the region showing an immigrant growth population far below the national trend. This case study explores the factors influencing work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants landing and staying in St. Louis. It seeks to understand the main factors associated with this demographic to provide practical approaches to improve the retention and attraction of work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants to the St. Louis region.

St. Louis has not kept pace with population growth compared to other faster-growing regions and the national population growth as a whole (Schmid, 2021). St. Louis' 106,000 Latinos and Hispanics are far below the 300,000 to 500,000 the region would have if it matched national trends (Drew, 2022). In 2018, St. Louis was the 3rd fastest growing major metro for immigration, but after Covid-19 the travel restrictions caused staggered growth. Attracting and retaining immigrants in St. Louis has been challenging, with the region showing a decline in the foreign-born population since 2018 (Sandoval, 2024).

Given the region's underperformance compared to national trends, St. Louis continues to refine its approach toward demographic transformation based on lessons learned over the years. Understanding the key drivers contributing to foreign-born work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants landing and staying in St. Louis is important. This research delves deeper into various factors contributing to work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants' establishing long-term residency in St. Louis. The rest of the paper contains the literature review, laying the groundwork for the study's concepts and research inquiries, then it outlines the propositions derived from the theoretical framework, details the methodology, presents the findings, discusses their implications for theory and practice, and concludes with the discussion.

## Literature Review

Many Hispanic/Latino immigrants come to the United States to reunite with family members or to build better futures for their families. Their strong social networks provide support systems that foster community resilience and cohesion. For these reasons, many regions within the United States that have faced population decline or slow growth have embraced a local pro-immigrant approach (Huang & Liu, 2019; Caldwell, 2024). These local approaches to welcoming immigrants can be effective in changing rates of immigration, as shown in Huang's 2022 study of Global Detroit's efforts to increase immigration.

Latino and Hispanic immigrants are vital to the U.S. economy, actively participating in key industries such as education, agriculture, construction, and hospitality. With the native-born population aging and birth rates declining, these immigrants are essential in filling labor gaps in critical sectors (Rodriguez-Sanchez, 2022). Their entrepreneurial spirit is another major asset. Latino and Hispanic immigrants start businesses at higher rates than the general population, driving economic growth and job creation within their communities (Robles & Cordero-Guzman, 2007).

St. Louis has experienced slower population growth compared to national trends and other areas (Schmid, 2021). The region's Hispanic/Latino population is significantly smaller than if it reflected national demographics (Drew, 2022). Despite a brief surge in immigration before COVID-19, attracting and retaining immigrants, especially those from foreign-born backgrounds has been a challenge since 2018 (Sandoval, 2024).

Given the region's underperformance compared to national trends, St. Louis continues to refine its approach toward demographic transformations based on lessons learned over the years. Understanding the key drivers contributing to foreign-born work-authorized Latino/Hispanic

immigrants landing and staying in St. Louis is important. This research project delves deeper into various factors contributing to Hispanic/Latino immigrants' establishing long-term residency in St. Louis.

This research aims to identify strategies for attracting and retaining work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants in St. Louis. By interviewing Hispanic/Latino immigrants, the study explores their experiences, decision-making processes, and reasons for choosing St. Louis as a destination. The findings aim to contribute to both academic understanding and the development of policies that could make St. Louis a more appealing location for Hispanic/Latino immigrants. The analysis of factors underpinning the phenomenon of immigrant attraction and retention is predominantly shaped by three theoretical frameworks: Human Capital, Social Network Analysis, and Optimal Distinctiveness Theories.

### ***Human Capital Theory***

Human Capital Theory (HCT) is an economic framework that emphasizes individuals' skills, knowledge, and abilities as valuable assets (Sharma, 2014). When applied to Latino immigrant populations, particularly concerning community integration and retention, HCT offers insights into how educational attainment, skills development, entrepreneurship, and cultural competency influence outcomes. HCT examines how training and education can enhance an individual's productivity and effectiveness, thereby benefiting employers, while also increasing earnings and opportunities for employees (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2005). The pursuit of education and skills is desirable for both individuals and companies. Understanding the educational background of Hispanic/Latino immigrants enables communities to tailor educational programs and support services to meet their specific needs, thereby enhancing the population's overall skill level and employability.

### ***Social Network Analysis (SNA)***

Social Network Analysis (SNA), a crucial component of network theory, involves mapping and analyzing relationships between individuals or groups (Freeman, 2004). Within Latino immigrant populations, SNA can be employed to identify and scrutinize social connections within the community. This understanding of social networks provides valuable insights into the support systems, communication channels, and sources of information that influence Latino immigrants' decisions to migrate to, remain in, or leave various communities. Network theory underscores the significance of connections and relationships. This study seeks to determine the value of networks for Hispanic/Latino immigrants and their role in the attraction and retention of these populations in St. Louis.

Human Capital Theory and Social Network Analysis have significant implications for both the attraction and retention of immigrants in St. Louis. Meanwhile, social networks critically influence individuals' access to educational and job opportunities, shaping their success. These theories form the basis for the study's first two propositions: that immigrants will be encouraged to come to and stay in St. Louis due to these factors.

***Proposition 1:*** Hispanic/Latino immigrants will be encouraged to come and stay in St. Louis if they see educational and job opportunities to support their families

***Proposition 2:*** Hispanic/Latino immigrants will be encouraged to come and stay in St. Louis if entrepreneurship opportunities and friendly government policies for immigrant participation in the economy are present in a region.

### ***Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT)***

Previous studies by Shore et al. (2011, 2021) and Randel et al. (2018) have applied Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) to elucidate how inclusion meets individuals'

simultaneous needs for belongingness and uniqueness. ODT posits that individuals have a dual need to be similar to others, thereby achieving a sense of belonging, and to be distinct, thereby maintaining a sense of uniqueness (Shore & Chung, 2023). This case study aims to explore the roles of belongingness and uniqueness in the retention of Hispanic/Latino immigrants in St. Louis.

A study on Hispanic consumer preferences in product communications and marketing indicates that Hispanics favor marketing that incorporates their unique preferences in a dual format. They value the recognition of their distinct identity and cultural uniqueness while also being included in mainstream marketing efforts (Chattaraman et al., 2009). In other words, products resonate more with Hispanic consumers when marketing communications address their specific cultural characteristics while integrating these elements into broader consumer group messaging. This approach allows individuals to feel recognized for their uniqueness while also fostering a sense of belonging within the larger group. We propose that Work-Authorized Hispanics/Latinos will be more inclined to choose St. Louis as a destination city and consider long-term residency if their needs for both uniqueness and belonging are met.

Social Network Analysis and Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, speak, respectively, to the role of networks in shaping access to information, opportunity, community supports, and relationships; the balance of being valued for one's uniqueness and belongingness; and the process of immigrants navigating and modifying customs and behaviors to adapt to their new environment which is affected by the length of time one is in a new environment. These theories underlie the study's exploration of how the St. Louis region's civic and community infrastructure functions to welcome immigrants, navigate resources, and connect with Hispanic/Latino cultural

assets and community. These theories shape the study's third and fourth propositions being investigated:

*Proposition 3:* Hispanic/Latino work-authorized immigrants look for quality of life, including legal, health, finance, housing, transportation, safety, faith, and sports amenities/assets that they can engage with; and

*Proposition 4:* Hispanic/Latino work-authorized immigrants look for social and cultural belongingness while retaining their uniqueness.

The three theoretical frameworks underpinning this study—Human Capital Theory, Social Network Analysis (a component of Network Theory), and Optimal Distinctiveness Theory address various facets that may shape the immigrant journey, from arriving in a particular region to remaining there.

## **Methodology**

The goal of this paper is to understand how to support and create environments that will attract and retain more work-authorized Hispanics/Latinos in St. Louis. This was done through qualitative interviews with Hispanic/Latino immigrants, and the researcher's line of questions was guided by the interview protocol. The protocol explored the sequence of events, decision points, experiences of St. Louis, and reasons Hispanic/Latino immigrants landed in St. Louis and chose to stay. Through this project, our aim is to contribute to the academic discourse and yield insights useful for developing informed policies and initiatives that will allow St. Louis to be an attractive immigration destination for work-authorized Hispanics/Latinos.

## *Research Question*

What are the factors attracting and retaining foreign-born work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants in St. Louis?

A research case study method with semi-structured interviews was utilized for the study. The interview questions were developed based on the propositions derived from the literature review and the theory framework encompassing the study. An interview guide led the questioning of the researchers. Qualifying participants were identified by leveraging a partnership with the Mosaic Project in St. Louis. In addition, researchers used the snowball technique to identify additional participants who were referred from the initial interviewees. The study was promoted on social media through Hispanic/Latino professional networks that matched similar profiles and qualifying metrics.

#### *Data Collection, Sample, and Analysis*

The recruitment process consisted of an invitation email sent by the Mosaic Project introducing the researchers to the qualifying candidates. We completed interviews with 12 participants. The sample is composed of 5 Mexicans (45.45%), 2 Puerto Ricans (18.18%), 1 Colombian (9%), and 3 mixed Hispanic heritage participants (27.27%). Sixty-three percent (63%) of the participants were women and thirty-seven percent (37%) were male. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the participants were married and fifty-five percent 55% had children. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 72 years old with a median age of 43.82. Ninety percent (90%) of the participants are currently employed in fields representing human resources, consulting, fashion retail, non-profit organizations, higher education, healthcare, and government agencies. Ninety percent (90%) of the employed participants are middle or executive managers with an average time in the current job of 4.96 years. The average time residing in the city is 11.86 years with a low range of 3 years and a high range of 26 years living in St. Louis.

Interviews, on average, were sixty minutes in length and recorded using Zoom technology with transcription. After the transcriptions were reviewed, we deidentified the



information to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, and their occupations, relatives' names and other personal information were deidentified with generic information.

The researchers used Quirkos to code the interviews and develop emerging themes. The coding process was divided into three iterations. The first iteration was processed individually by one of the researchers to identify the topics and themes on the individual transcripts. The second iteration was completed in pairs where researchers met and discussed a set of the transcripts and reviewed them as a team to agree on the proposed themes. The final iteration included all researchers reviewing the transcripts for a final time and grouping them for standardized coding. The final group's experiential themes are included in Appendix A.

## **Findings**

Hispanic/Latino immigrants contemplate the potential establishment of social networks within their destination city to facilitate connection. Nonetheless, the presence or absence of these networks does not appear to significantly deter work-authorized Hispanic/Latino immigrants from relocating to St. Louis, as long as other elements like professional opportunities are driving the determinations for moving. Yet, as highlighted by the participants in this study, social networks stand as one of the prime factors contributing to work-authorized Hispanic/Latino retention and long-term settlement in the St. Louis area. This is attributed to the crucial role social networks play in preserving cultural traditions and language; thereby fostering a sense of belonging.

## **Drivers to St. Louis as a Destination City**

Participants revealed that their choice of St. Louis as a destination wasn't random. Instead, it was mainly driven by job opportunities and family situations. Many of them held mid-

level supervisory or professional positions that required specific expertise. They were attracted by appealing job offers they found through various channels, which seemed more enticing than other options. In some cases, chance played a significant role in choosing St. Louis. However, it became clear through discussions that the main reason they decided to move to St. Louis was the unique job opportunities available, which offered them and their families a better quality of life.

### **Professional Opportunities**

The main driver identified by our participants was the professional opportunities they accessed in St. Louis. Ten out of the twelve participants indicated the professional opportunities they had access to, were the main reasons for their landing in St. Louis.

Participant # 5, a Higher Education professor, shared that his exposure to the city through a summer internship (fellow) was the reason for him to consider the opportunity to move to St. Louis once a full-time job position appeared as a possibility.

*“Yeah. So how it came up to be...[thinking] I believe part of the process started in 2017 when I got accepted to a summer internship program at Washington University in Saint Louis. I didn't know before then, you know, where St. Louis was. Where was the State of Missouri, and I had the opportunity to be in the summer program, which was 2017 and 2018. Then in 2019, there was an opening for a biochemistry instructor position that was actually opened by the same institution where I was working in Puerto Rico. I think what really helped push why, why here and not the other States was that the opportunity was there present and available”.*

A similar story was shared by Participant #11, a legislative assistant.

*“I would say the first one was definitely professional development. I had always been*

*passionate about entrepreneurship, and I looked into this program that someone recommended to me. And it's also located in California, but it's located in five other cities and St. Louis is one of them. And so, it was a public affairs fellowship."*

opportunities arise when Hispanics/Latinos arrive in St. Louis. Participant #7 shared that her husband wanted to open a Mexican restaurant when they lived in Southwest Detroit. The opportunity presented itself to move to St. Louis and start the restaurant there.

*"The market was very saturated [for Mexican restaurants in Detroit], so we came at Christmas, and we started looking for a building, and he [spouse] found something, and it's more affordable here, too. Right? So that was another driving force."*

The participants clearly stated that the main drivers to land in St. Louis are related to professional opportunities. However, the majority of them also linked their selection of St. Louis as a destination city with family and the opportunity to access a better comparative quality of life.

## **Family**

Hispanic/Latino immigrants are known for their interest in preserving family ties and cultural values (Morales-Alexander, 2021). During the interviews performed for this case study, we identified that nine out of the eleven participants cited their family members or the opportunity to be close to family as one of the main drivers to St. Louis.

Participant #8 shared his main reason for moving to St. Louis was the need to support his mother and provide for her.

*"My father died and my mom is here so I'm taking responsibility as her provider."*

In other cases, the decision comes as part of the search for a support system that can provide additional opportunities to succeed in the career path selected. Participant #6, a 34-year-

old female, came to St. Louis after the medical residency selection process landed her as a neurology resident at a teaching hospital.

*“And then the other thing that drew me here is that my parents moved to St. Louis in 2014. In terms of having my family around. Honestly, it's been great. They live not too far away, like a 40-minute drive, and, you know, whenever I want to do something [with the family] we can. We just went to the Wineries this weekend... so having that, and then they've also been very supportive. And you know, if I'm kind of like slammed with work, my mom and dad would sometimes even bring me lunch or dinner, which is really nice.”*

Some of our participants expressed their need to stay close to family as part of their well-being and the conservation of their culture and values. Participant #1 expressed how hard it was for her to stay in another state while her family was moving to the Midwest region.

*“My sister moved to St. Louis. My parents were traveling a lot and my aunt started her own business in St. Louis. I felt alone being in Miami without my family. I decided to take a leap of faith and move to St. Louis to help my sister and be closer to family”.*

Participant #2, a Cuban-Mexican semi-retired consultant, highlighted how important it was for him and his wife to be part of their grandchild's life. The need was strong enough to make them move to St. Louis to ensure their active participation in their lives.

*“We moved to keep our family together and to help raise our sweet granddaughter and now recent grandson.”*

### **Comparative Quality of Life as a Driver to the City**

In interviews with our participants, we were able to identify that one of the main motivators that served as a supportive factor in decision-making was the assessment of the

comparative quality of life that could be achieved by living in St. Louis, especially when compared to the home country or other cities in the United States.

Participant #6, expressed how during her process of ranking possible residency programs for her graduate physician training, she considered her standards for quality of life to establish the program list priority:

*“Honestly, in terms of cities, I wanted to live in a place where with the resident salary, would be able to afford something bigger than a closet to live in. For example, New York was one of my top ten[options] at some point. It wasn't in my top five. One of the programs was really good, and I ranked it a little bit higher. But really, I mostly ranked Midwest cities in my top 5.”*

The cost of living in St. Louis was a common factor among the ten participants who highlighted quality of life as part of the reasons for allowing themselves to explore the city of St. Louis as a destination.

*“I would say, perhaps the cost of living, the fact that the areas that we were staying in were a couple of steps above where we were residing back in Puerto Rico.”*

Participant #5

*“Being able to have my own bigger space and money, I would be able to do more with my money than in a bigger city.”* Participant #6

Other aspects of quality of life that were common among the participants included the pace of life in the city, easy access to basic services, and the opportunity to enjoy valuable resources that enable family activities without impacting the budget, including access to parks, museums, and the zoo free of charge.

## Why Do People Stay in St. Louis?

Most participants in this study expressed that St. Louis was not an initial option on their list of potential destination cities; however, family situations and attractive employment opportunities made the city a viable choice. In the next phase of the study, we explored what motivates these Hispanic immigrants to stay in St. Louis once they experience residing in this city.

## Networks and Support Systems

Ninety percent of the participants identified their personal and professional networks as strong motivators to stay in St. Louis. The Latino immigrants interviewed for this study indicated their networks including family, friends, and co-workers have been fundamental, not only for their wanting to stay in St. Louis but also for their adaptation process.

Participant #7, an executive for a non-profit organization indicated that her positive experience in the city has predominantly stemmed from her support network. She is returning to St. Louis for the second time in her life after she left the city twenty years ago. She indicated that her experience the first time around had marked her negatively and made her have second thoughts about relocating to St. Louis. However, she identifies the network she developed through her job to be foundational for her decision to set roots in the city again.

*“Although I say I love being back in St. Louis, I also understand that a lot of that had to do with the people that I knew in the network and where I worked. St. Louis and the people in St. Louis quickly helped me realize how wrong I was, and that things had changed. Now, granted, my disclaimer is I lived in the [my work] bubble. So, I was protected and surrounded by Spanish speakers, professional Latinos, important people, and business owners every day.” Participant #7*

Participant #11 shares similar feedback when she identifies her coworkers at her first fellowship rotation at an innovation/entrepreneurial center as the reason for her staying in St. Louis.

*“My first placement was a nonprofit at Cortex...those folks working there... that first placement, I always say that first placement really set the foundation for my whole experience throughout the fellowship, and then me wanting to stay because they really brought me in.”*

Some of these professionals also highlighted the exposure their work networks provide them, and how that enhances their relationships with other Hispanics/Latinos in the city.

*“Here people know me. People know what I do. The community is great. I love it when I go somewhere and [they] say, Oh, Ana, from [my Company]! She's here! I help the Hispanic population and others. The big reason is that people recognize you. I love it.”*

Participant #9

The development of Latino networks in the city is particularly identified as one of the reasons to keep a permanent residence in the city. These types of networks provide a sense of conservation of cultural traits, primarily the Spanish Language.

*“Latinos are very proud of their heritage. We love to connect with people. When I started to build my network of Spanish-speaking people, it felt normal. When people would come to my home, they would bake a fresh Mexican cake or bring some type of side dish that would make us feel like we were back home. By bringing such treats to my home it makes me feel that my people want to connect and share such experiences together.”* Participant

#1

### **Comparative Quality of Life as a motivator to Stay**

The main reason for long-term settlement stems from the comparative quality of life that these immigrants have experienced; accessibility to services, enjoyment of social life, the pace of the city, and a deep sense of progress that resonates in each story of the interviewees. Once people establish themselves, they become accustomed to and compare how life is back home versus how things are in the United States. The interviewees shared how the experience of quality of life in the city has been a catalyst for their determination to stay.

*“I would say the pace of the day-to-day. The rhythm of traffic...as opposed to these large and big cities where you are mindlessly stuck in a two-hour traffic jam because of poor city planning. I would say...and this may sound a little odd, but also the supermarkets. There are a lot of fresh products that really seem like high quality, and I think partly has to do with the geographical location of the State.” Participant #5*

*“We live in a central location close to everything, and we are happy that our dollar stretches much further here than where we used to live.” Participant #2*

### **Sense of Belongingness**

The networks and the experiences of the quality of life these professional Hispanics/Latinos had experienced helped them find a home away from home, shaping their sense of belongingness to the city. Eighty-one percent of the participants mentioned their networks as the primary reason for their feeling of belonging to the city, many of those networks being a result of the professional opportunities that attracted them initially to St. Louis.

*“Any time I’m included in a project or consulted by older members of some board that I’m part of it, it makes me feel like I belong. I feel appreciated when people ask me for advice. Recently my landlord came up to me and said how great of a job I’ve done. I have*



*a store now on Cherokee. I feel good and appreciated. It's nice to see people see my achievement and recognize my achievement despite the challenges in the beginning."*

Participant #3

The opportunity to connect with other Hispanics/Latinos is also one of the main reasons for the participant's decision to stay in the city. They actively seek to strengthen and expand Latino networks to ensure the conservation of their cultural traditions and find a place where they feel like they fully belong in the city. Participant #8 mentions how his involvement in his community provides him with a deep sense of belongingness:

*"I feel pretty well connected and involved in the community. I'm involved with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and participate in their Hispanic Leadership program. I like to identify myself as Cuban/Hispanic and being engaged in the Hispanic community is important to me. Knowing there are Hispanic communities here from associations and cultural associations that do a lot to create that culture here."*

Participant #3, a fashion entrepreneur also shared how her involvement with the Latino community in St. Louis has helped strengthen her bonds with the city:

*"I'm a supporter in general - if I see anyone launching anything I try to go out of my way to go to their events and grand openings, and very active on social media. I'm part of the Latin Arts Network. I also volunteer for the Collective Friend - a non-profit organization -, and employ immigrants and refugees - paying them a decent living wage."*

Other participants highlighted how their participation in church in their mother language has made them feel more at home.

*"The Churches that have Spanish Mass have also created systems of inclusion. St. Cecelia and some Churches in Bridgeton, St. Charles, and in North County are important*

*as many people are Catholic and build their identity and community around their faith.”*

Participant #4

Finally, their general integration into the communities they live in and the sense of acceptance from their neighbors is a part of the quality of life and the development of belongingness to the St. Louis City as expressed by many participants.

*“Actually, I get along well with my neighbors. I even had neighbors say that we are kind of a very interesting neighbors to have. I don't feel isolated or alienated, or any of this such.”* Participant #5

*“I think I've positioned myself into an environment where I feel that I do belong. My Family, my culture and work are what make me feel like I belong. I feel very blessed and happy to say that I feel a strong sense of belonging in St. Louis.”* Participant #4

They say “Home is where family is,” and Hispanic/Latino immigrants go to great lengths to ensure better opportunities, a better quality of life, and a place of acceptance and happiness for their families. Based on the recollections of our participant's experiences St. Louis is a place where Latino immigrants can find a place to belong. Nevertheless, this sense of belonging does not come without its challenges. While many participants expressed a strong connection to the city, they also identified several common challenges faced by the Latino community in St. Louis.

### **Staying Despite the Challenges**

Through the in-depth interviews conducted in our research study, several common themes emerged as significant challenges faced by the Hispanic/Latino population in St. Louis. One prominent issue is the desegregation within Latino communities, which hinders the formation of a cohesive support network. Language barriers also pose a substantial obstacle, limiting access to essential services and employment opportunities. Additionally, many participants expressed an

unawareness of available resources, which exacerbates their struggles. Compounding these difficulties is the perception of a lack of support from broader community institutions. These challenges highlight the complex and multifaceted reality for Latino immigrants in St. Louis, despite their strong sense of belonging and determination to improve their lives.

### **Desegregation of Latino Communities**

The desegregation of Latino/Hispanic communities is a bit difficult for people when they first arrive in St. Louis. They are used to coming from communities where neighbors have Latino backgrounds. Many develop solutions for connecting via social media to find people who can speak their language and familiarize themselves with their community.

*“I made a public Instagram account to connect in STL. It’s hard to make friends in St. Louis - there are bubbles. It took at least five years to feel included - being on more boards and connecting with people. The adjustment process takes a little longer. Everything is fragmented - you have to look for it. You really don’t have neighborhoods with specific cultures like that Latino population.”* Participant #3

*“The Hispanic/Latino population is not in the same sector. They are spread around the Metro area. We are everywhere to approach everybody because everybody is spread”*  
Participant #10

### **Language and Cultural Barriers**

Two-thirds of the participants indicated the English language was a challenge either for them or for their family members and that the adaptation process was impacted due to the lack of Spanish speakers in agencies and businesses. Even among this group composed of mid-managers and specialized professionals, the language has added a layer of difficulty to their development as citizens and to their adaptation process.

Some of the participants expressed how at times they felt uncomfortable to some extent due to their accent or their limitations in the English language and how that impacted their professional performance to some level.

*“In the first year, it was really challenging practicing medicine in a different language...when you practice medicine, you develop a script over time of how you say things. I didn't have that, and it took me a while to develop it while I was getting adjusted to a different culture, and line of work.”* explained Participant #6, a resident at a Teaching Hospital in St. Louis.

Participant #5, a Higher Education Professor, mirrored the sentiment when expressing that not being able to sound like a native English speaker has caused him some level of discomfort.

*“I have people who, whenever I'm speaking to them, I see them paying a lot of attention to my lips because they're trying to read and trying to understand what I'm trying to say”*

Participant #5

Other participants emphasized that limitations on access to Spanish-speaking individuals in various agencies, including healthcare providers, create a barrier for the Hispanic population in St. Louis, especially during the initial months in the city.

*“Most [people] in our community don't speak English, and sometimes they can't find help. You will see many agencies to help here, but they don't have people that speak Spanish, and our clients don't speak English, 90% don't speak English.”* Participant #9, non-profit organization mid-manager

*“Well, language access has to be one of my main soap box moments. Not necessarily because I need it, but because I understand that our community does. And during the pandemic, we saw that firsthand.”* Participant #7

While Participant #10, shared a story of how hard it was for her to prepare for job interviews given her limitations with the English language:

*“I prepare my answers and memorized the answers because as I was saying, I wasn't comfortable with my English. I memorized my answers by writing them down.”*

The participants also mentioned the cultural differences as challenges during their adaptation period.

### **Unawareness of Resources and Lack of Support Perception**

Interestingly, in the conversations with our interviewees, we identified that two-thirds of our participants were unaware of support services to help during the transition and adaptation process when moving to St. Louis.

*“I had to figure that out by myself. The only help I got was from this friend of mine. We look at crime rates. We look at heat maps. We looked at school ratings. But no, nobody was there to help me. I had no idea where I was heading. I could pretty much just take a gamble and live in the Ghetto.”* Participant #5

Participant #6 indicated that she didn't have access to collaborators or agencies to help her transition into the city.

*“I didn't look for it either. Maybe I should have. I feel like I just try to figure it out on my own. But yeah, I didn't work with anyone.”*

Also, the other third of participants were not connected with these services up until after moving to the city and spending some time on it.

Participants also mentioned that the city did not have enough incentives for entrepreneurs and that many times the lack of knowledge regarding aids, and services and how to navigate them made landing and staying in St. Louis more difficult.

*“In order to increase more Latino people, the city and county should provide more incentives for people to start their businesses here.” Participant #1*

Incentives that the participant shared were start-up entrepreneurship loans and having predetermined housing and transportation logistics confirmed prior to arrival to St. Louis.

*“And so, once I was in [the chamber], it was easier for me to let him [my husband] know or introduce him to the people, and it took the pressure from him to ask for help. If that makes any sense. And that continues to be a barrier, I think for many immigrants or new arrivals to St. Louis.” Participant #7*

The reality is there is a diversity of programs in the city dedicated to helping immigrants with the process of transition, however, the information obtained from our participants indicates unawareness of those programs. Programs that are offered through the International Institute, provides an immigrant service and information hub. They offer programs and services for immigrants, their families, and the wider community. These services include first-touch assistance, resources, and community engagement that provide a range of services, including English classes for adults, job search support, employment training, career advancement programs, assistance with licensing, refugee resettlement, immigration application preparation, mental health services, elderly services, counseling, and translation services. In addition, the St. Louis Mosaic Project focuses on welcoming and integrating immigrants. They offer networking opportunities, job assistance, and English language learning classes to help immigrants thrive in the region.

Language, culture, lack of support and networks, and isolated communities are the factors involved in the Latino/Hispanic people feeling isolated when moving to St. Louis. Nevertheless,

the majority of the interviewees expressed that despite these challenges they have found a home in St. Louis and decided to stay

### **Lessons for Practice**

This study offers several key insights for the St. Louis region as it aims to attract and retain Hispanic/Latino immigrants. The first major takeaway is the need to increase the number of Hispanic/Latino immigrants coming to St. Louis. For the professional workers in our study, job opportunities were the primary reason for choosing St. Louis. Our participants noted that there isn't much "buzz" about St. Louis that drives interest in the region. Additionally, the network effects influencing people to move to St. Louis are limited compared to the networks that encourage them to stay. This suggests that, at least in the near term, the region should strengthen its connections with Hispanic/Latino communities elsewhere, focusing on linking them with professional opportunities in St. Louis to advance their education, careers, or business prospects.

The second major insight is the need to continue building local networks that help immigrants navigate professional and community support, social circles, and Hispanic/Latino cultural amenities. Participants highlighted instances where existing networks, chambers, and programs helped—and could have done more to help—people build professional and personal relationships and navigate new systems and local government agencies. Many expressed a desire to connect with other Hispanic/Latino social circles and cultural assets, such as Spanish-speaking church services, grocery stores with food from their home countries, and community events celebrating their traditions. To address this, the region should focus on developing Hispanic/Latino businesses and cultural assets, making these amenities more available and accessible to immigrants.

An interesting observation from our study is that the Hispanic/Latino population is spread across the St. Louis region, and it took new immigrants a few months to find support agencies and networking opportunities. They felt more comfortable living in St. Louis once connected with these agencies and communities. Proactively reaching out to new immigrants could help families settle quickly and understand the processes in their new home.

The third insight is to amplify the region's strengths in fostering belonging while addressing challenges related to belongingness and uniqueness. Participants found integrating with their community to be a significant source of belonging, but they faced specific challenges like language barriers and cultural differences. Increasing resources for organizations, coalitions, and individuals to appreciate Hispanic/Latino immigrants' uniqueness could be beneficial.

The fourth insight involves direct efforts to help families support their relatives moving to St. Louis. Many individuals rely on their families for support during significant life changes, such as relocating. By assisting families in facilitating these moves, communities create a network that fosters economic mobility. When people can rely on family support, they are more likely to take risks, like moving for better job opportunities or education, leading to improved economic outcomes. Empowering families to assist their relatives in transitioning to St. Louis can make the city more diverse and enhance economic opportunities for the entire community.

Finally, the fifth insight is the importance of highlighting the comparative quality of life in communications. This includes recruitment materials for professional opportunities and identifying regions where St. Louis can proactively build relationships and a marketing presence. The cost of living, regional amenities, housing inventory, and professional opportunities can be attractive compared to other places, whether they are more expensive or in developing countries.



## **Contributions to Theory**

This study contributes to existing theory in three significant ways. First, it expands knowledge regarding social networks by highlighting the reliance of Hispanic/Latino individuals on professional and personal networks when selecting destination cities during their migration process. Second, it provides additional insights into human capital theory by emphasizing the importance of professional opportunities and development for work-authorized Hispanic/Latino individuals in their migration decision-making. Finally, it identifies specific elements that promote the sense of belongingness and uniqueness among Hispanic/Latinos in St. Louis, thereby contributing to the practical application of Optimal Distinctiveness Theory.

Interestingly, the lack of social networks and support was one of the challenges most shared by the participants. St. Louis lacks defined Hispanic/Latino communities, which makes the interaction process more difficult. Most of the participants did not have previous contacts with social service agencies or organizations that can assist with integration into the community or identifying resources and easing adaptation.

The primary driver for work-authorized Hispanic/Latino people moving to St. Louis is professional opportunities, rather than a desire to be in St. Louis. Immigrants frequently shared stories of learning about and being offered an educational or job opportunity which was the first step in their journey to St. Louis. A secondary factor for relocation to St. Louis is a family connection. Finally, factors supporting Hispanic/Latino immigrants moving to St. Louis are tied to comparative quality of life - the region's low cost of living, amenities, and services.

These factors remain the most salient drivers of immigrants staying with a few nuances when compared to the storylines of the immigrants' journey to St. Louis. The impact of networks grew in importance with thirty-seven references to networks from participants when talking

about staying in St. Louis versus thirteen references regarding networks in the process of arriving in St. Louis. These comments include positive and negative stories about the importance of networks and how immigrants acculturate and navigate the region; as well as find connections with other immigrants and cultural assets in the region. Further, references to belongingness were numerous in the experience of those staying compared to a limited number of references being made to examples of immigrants feeling valued for their uniqueness.

The patterns in the participants' storylines provide significant support for the study's first proposition - immigrants will be encouraged to come and stay in St. Louis if they see educational and job opportunities to support their families. The study's second proposition posits that professional opportunities encompass entrepreneurship, which is marginally supported with some participants noting difficulty navigating government policies. The third proposition postulated quality of life as one of the main drivers to the city for Hispanics/Latinos. The results support the proposition. Quality of life was commonly described by the participants as a dual assessment: (1) the comparison against the country of origin or prior state, and (2) quality of life defined as the ability to access culturally relevant amenities (church, community, groceries, etc.).

The study's fourth proposition focuses on the immigrants' desire to attain social and cultural belongingness while retaining their uniqueness. The participants' comments support the need for belonging within this population. Participants commented on their experiences and the sense of belongingness found in the city but also spoke of challenges centered around language barriers, cultural challenges, and lack of support and networks. Immigrants feel valued for their uniqueness, but comments related to this phenomenon were not as prevalent in the interviews as were belonging and challenges related to belonging.

## Discussion

This study has numerous insights for the St. Louis region as it attempts to recruit, retain, and increase Hispanic/Latino immigrants. The first significant implication is related to increasing the number of Hispanic/Latino immigrants coming to St. Louis. For the professional workers in this study, typified by the sample, professional opportunities are the main reason for selecting St. Louis. According to our participants, there is no “buzz” about St. Louis driving interest in the region. Further, the existing networks are not fully formed to capture and influence Hispanic/Latino immigrants to stay in St. Louis. These two facts suggest that the region’s attention should be on increasing its networks with and between Hispanic/Latino communities, connecting them with professional opportunities in St. Louis to further their education, career, and business prospects.

The second significant implication is the perception of lack of support from the region verbalized by the participants of the study. This perception may be a reason to continue to build the local networks that aid immigrants in navigating professional and community support, social circles, and Hispanic/Latino cultural amenities. Participants spoke of situations where existing networks, chambers, and programs fall short in the process of providing guidance to navigate new systems and local government agencies. Many mentioned a desire to connect with other Hispanic/Latino social circles and cultural assets such as Spanish-speaking church services, grocery stores with food from their home countries, and community events/celebrations as conducted in their traditions. Tied to this implication, the region may pursue more intentional development of Hispanic/Latino businesses and cultural assets to increase the availability and ease of access to these amenities for immigrants.

*Practical Relevance*

One interesting observation from our study is that the Hispanic/Latino population is spread across the St. Louis region. It took new immigrants a few months to search for support agencies and networking opportunities. After getting connected with these agencies and communities, they felt comfortable living in St. Louis. If the support agencies can proactively reach out to new immigrants in the region, it could be useful for newer families to settle quickly and understand the processes in their new home country.

The third implication for the region is the opportunity to build upon belongingness and positive feelings of valued uniqueness while tackling the common challenges expressed by the participants. Many participants indicated integrating with their community was a tremendous source of belongingness. Still, there are specific unmet needs around language barriers, as well as finding a community where they don't face as many cultural challenges. It also appears that while participants often developed a sense of belonging, there were fewer situations where they felt appreciated for their uniqueness. While the networks that have been built in the region have impacted belongingness, more resources for organizations, coalitions, and individuals to show their appreciation of Hispanic/Latino immigrants' uniqueness may prove useful.

The fourth substantial implication entails direct efforts to aid families who wish to support their relatives moving to St. Louis. Many individuals rely on their families for support when making significant life changes, such as moving to a new city. By aiding families in facilitating these moves, communities are essentially creating a network that fosters economic mobility. When people can rely on their families for assistance, they're more likely to take risks such as moving for better job or education opportunities, which can lead to improved economic outcomes. As more families are empowered to assist their relatives in making these transitions,

the city becomes more diverse, and economic opportunities become more accessible; ultimately benefiting the entire community.

The fifth implication of this study is the importance of embedding messages emphasizing the quality of life Hispanics/Latinos can experience in the region. These include recruitment material for professional opportunities as well as identifying regions where St. Louis may be proactive in building relationships and a marketing presence. The cost of living, amenities in the region, housing inventory, and professional opportunities can be enticing in comparison to living conditions in other places. This is true in both places that are more expensive to live in and in developing countries.

## **Conclusion**

The findings suggest that more attention must be paid to promoting career educational opportunities, support networks, and quality of life for work-authorized Hispanics/Latinos in the St. Louis region. Language barriers, housing, and decentralized communities must be addressed as the main challenges experienced by Hispanics/Latinos relocating to this region.

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## Appendix A: Table of Group Experiential Themes

### Table of Group Experiential Themes (GETS)

#### A. DRIVERS TO ST. LOUIS AS A DESTINATION CITY

**St. Louis is not habitually on the list of destination cities considered by the work-authorized Hispanics/Latinos; it is often professional opportunities driving the decision to land in the region.**

*"The reason I came here is because I was transferred. My husband is an engineer. He works for a global company. In the spring of 2021, they proposed he come to the US, asking if he was interested in coming to the headquarters here in Washington, Missouri. That's why I live in Washington, Missouri because the headquarters of the Uptick of the division where he works are here. He works for the same company in Mexico, and they have different plans there, in Mexico, in they develop different products. So after talking, we decided to accept the job offer. So that's why we moved to the US." Participant #10*

*"Yeah. So how it came up to be...[thinking] I believe part of the process started in 2017 when I got accepted to a summer internship program at Washington University in Saint Louis. I didn't know before then, you know, where St. Louis was. Where was the State of Missouri and I had the opportunity to be in the summer program, that was 2017 and 2018. Then in 2019, there was an opening for a biochemistry instructor position that actually was opened by the same institution where I was working in Puerto Rico. This opportunity came up, and my wife and I have been, you know, having our discussions about moving to the mainland. I applied, you know, through the normal application process and took a leap of faith. You know I got accepted, took a leap of faith, and just moved. I think what really helped push why, why here and not the other States was that the opportunity was there present and available." Participant #5*

*"Family essentially came due to father's work at Monsanto. My parents were in Michigan prior to moving to St. Louis. Father received a 6-year stint in Sao Paulo and one year in Mexico City before coming to St. Louis. Right after they moved to St. Louis." Participant #8*

*"Yeah. Kind of like the short answer is, that it was the match process from the medical Residency programs. Essentially, while I was applying for residencies, one of the things that drew me to St. Louis, was that [Teaching Hospital] was a really great program. Just in general for doing any residences in particular, the one that I did, which is neurology. They were also kind of like one of the top institutions to do neurology research like number one in NIH funded, etc, particularly in dementia, which is what I was interested in at the time. So that drew me to apply to [the Teaching Hospital Residency Program in St. Louis]. "And then I got lucky enough that in the match*

*process, I matched. I don't know if you're familiar with the match process. But yeah, you create a list and cross your fingers. Hope for the best.” Participant #6*

*“I had a job offer, and I was open to new opportunities. I was recruited to St. Louis to help lead Midwest Bank and then, eventually, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. My skillsets allowed me to be an active leader in our community. I initially started working for a bank helping Latino people start new businesses”. Participant #4*

*“I had always been passionate about entrepreneurship, and I looked into this program that someone recommended to me. And it's also located in California. But it's located in 5 other cities and St. Louis is one of them. It was a public affairs, fellowship. There was a business placement, which I was really excited for. I was like, Hey, maybe business is my thing, or maybe it's not and so I just shipped my car, found a place to live and moved a couple of months after. I was hoping to stay in California, but I got into St. Louis. So it's kind of like a raffle system as well. At first, I did not think about it. I ignored the email and was like, I'm not leaving California. I had no intention to, but then I considered it. I spoke to some mentors who said - You know it would be great for you to get some perspective”. Participant #11*

*“The market was very saturated [for Mexican restaurants in Detroit], so we came at Christmas, and we started looking for a building, and he [spouse] found something, and it's more affordable here, too. Right? So that was another driving force.” Participant#7*

**The family support system is one of the main drivers when it comes to deciding on St. Louis as a destination city for work-authorized Hispanics/Latinos.**

*“It was my parents who came here for my father's job. My father died and my Mom is here so I'm taking responsibility as her provider”. Participant #8*

*“And then the other thing that drew me here is that my parents moved to St. Louis in 2014. In terms of having my family around. Honestly, it's been great. They live not too far away, like a 40-minute drive, and, you know, whenever I want to do something [with the family] we can. We just went to the Wineries this weekend... so having that, and then they've also been very supportive. And you know, if I'm kind of like slammed with work, my mom and dad would sometimes even bring me lunch or dinner, which is really nice.”. Participant #6*

*“My sister moved to St. Louis. My parents were traveling a lot and my aunt started her own business in St. Louis. I felt alone being in Miami without my family. I decided to take a leap of faith and move to St. Louis to help my sister and be closer to family”. Participant #1*

*"We lived in Miami for quite some time. Our eldest daughter met her partner in St. Louis and started a family. We were in the process of semi-retirement. Our youngest daughter followed her sister to help her take care of her child. We followed right after. We moved to keep our family together and to help raise our sweet granddaughter and now recent grandson. We feel family ties are important and want to support and share our Mexican traditions with our family and ensure our Spanish heritage and language continue." Participant #2*

*"I am from Mexico, but I was living in Miami for a brief time. This is where I met the father of my daughter. Things progressed quickly and I met his family and moved to St. Louis. Ten years later I'm still here. My little brother came here to finish High School. Now they own a home here because Miami would be too expensive." Participant #3*

*"I was going back and forth [from Detroit], and my husband and I we're like, well, maybe we should look at moving to St. Louis, and then that way you'll be closer to your mom. It won't be such a strain for you to be going on a 10-hour drive, or, you know, 3 or 4 hours depending on the flight. I really think that the main reason is family, whether it's because of her health, or just having some anchor person already here. We decided to live near my mom. Our restaurant was near my mom. So, we wanted to be close to her. Participant #7*

*"By then, my son, my firstborn son, was already, starting kindergarten and we had another one coming on the way. So, the financial socioeconomic situation as well as the political landscape [in Puerto Rico] didn't seem promising at all. It seemed very bleak. I took a leap of faith for my family and decided to move to St. Louis". Participant #5*

### **The comparative quality of life plays a central role in the decision-making process for Hispanics/Latinos considering migrating.**

*"I would say, perhaps the cost of living, the fact that the areas we were staying in were a couple of steps above where we were residing back in Puerto Rico. Hurricane Maria struck the Caribbean Island of Puerto Rico and painted a very bleak picture about the future, the prospect of quality of life, and overall, any chance for career development, career improvement, and just a simple quality of life." Participant #5*

*"Cost of living". Participant #8*

*"Honestly, in terms of the city, I wanted to live in a place where with the resident salary, I would be able to afford something bigger than a closet to live in. For example, while New York was one of my top ten [options] at some point. It wasn't in my top 5. The programs were really good, and I ranked it a little bit higher. But really, I mostly ranked Midwest cities in my top five. I guess you could call it the quality of life, or like what quality of life is for me, being able to have my*

*own bigger space and money, I would be able to do more with my money than in a bigger city. I wanted to be able to whenever I got home, open the door and be like, okay, I got home and not feel sad that I lived in a closet.” Participant #6*

*“The cost of living is way better than Miami.” Participant #10*

*“Cost of living”. Participant #2*

*“The second one [reason to select St. Louis] was probably the cost of living because it was a fellowship, and they didn't pay you like a job. I looked up St. Louis' cost of living and it was not as expensive as in the Bay area.” Participant #11*

## **B. REASONS FOR STAYING IN ST. LOUIS**

**Personal and professional networks provide a support system that allows Hispanics/Latinos to thrive in the region.**

*“Although I say I love being back in St. Louis, I also understand that a lot of that had to do with the people that I knew in the network and where I worked. St. Louis and the people in St. Louis quickly helped me realize how wrong I was, and that things had changed. Now, granted, my disclaimer is I lived in the [my work] bubble. So, I was protected and surrounded by Spanish speakers, professional Latinos, important people, and business owners every day.” Participant #7*

*“I didn't make strong connections in the program. I made them outside of the program with people from St. Louis. So, I think that's what contributed to my staying in St. Louis after. My first placement was a nonprofit at Cortex...those folks working there... that first placement, I always say that first placement really set the foundation for my whole experience throughout the fellowship, and then me wanting to stay because they really brought me in. I have a network of Latino folks that I can rely on and lean back on professionally and personally.” Participant #11*

*“Here people know me. People know what I do. The community is great. I love it when I go somewhere and [they] say, Oh, Ana, from [my Company]! She's here! I help the Hispanic population and others. The big reason is that people recognize you. I love it.” Participant #9*

*“Latinos are very proud of their heritage. We love to connect with people. When I started to build my network of Spanish-speaking people, it felt normal. When people would come to my home, they would bake a fresh Mexican cake or bring some type of side dish that would make us feel like we were back home. By bringing such treats to my home it makes me feel that my people want to connect and share such experiences together.” Participant #1*

*“We have once a month Hispanic networking. And I help a lot for those families. They're really coming with this country with a lot needs mental health problems.” Participant #9*

*"I am very involved with our Latino community - we invite one another for dinner frequently and go out to dinner at times. I've been invited to go to music festivals and motorcycle rides and golf outings by neighbors and friends of friends. It's nice establishing a new network of friends who have similar interests as me."* Participant #2

*"I'm a supporter in general. If I see anyone launching anything I try to go out of my way to go to their events, and grand openings, very active on social media. I'm part of the Latin Arts Network. I also volunteer for the Collective Friend a non-profit organization that employs immigrants and refugees and pays them a decent living wage. Anything related to fashion and the arts."* Participant #3

*"I have a mixed portfolio of friends, predominantly Latino, who are working together to help build strong communities and opportunities for people from our culture."* Participant #4

**Experiencing the quality of life accessible to Hispanics/Latinos in the region offers additional motivators to stay.**

*"I'm really comfortable living here. It's a small city that is very cool. Like the opposite of Monterey, Mexico, Mexico is more than 5 billion. So, it's a big city full of noise, of traffic. but it also has everything. You know. Restaurants, whatever you would like are one of the counties is the richest country in Latin America."* Participant #10

*"I would say the pace of the day-to-day. The rhythm of traffic...as opposed to these large and big cities where you are mindlessly stuck in a two-hour traffic jam because of poor city planning. I would say...and this may sound a little odd, but also the supermarkets. The product aisles, and the vegetables and fruits, and all of that. There are a lot of fresh products that really seem like high quality, and I think partly has to do with the geographical location of the State."* Participant #5

*"We live in a central location close to everything, and we are happy that our dollar stretches much further here than where we used to live."* Participant #2

*"There are economic opportunities - the dollar going farther than in other places."* Participant #8

*"It doesn't matter if Mom is pregnant with a status or no status immigration, they can apply for Medicaid. In this city, they can care for the pregnant mom until she has the baby."* Participant#9

*"And I feel that Saint Louis has a lot to do and a lot to offer. It just takes a little bit of time to find it. But there are a lot of ways that you can have fun in the city. And a lot of people say, oh, there's nothing to do in St. Louis, and I completely disagree with that. So yeah, I think I always find something to do that makes me happy. So, I feel happy."* Participant #6

*"The cost of living certainly helps too compared to where I came from."* Participant #1



*"I really enjoy it. I enjoy the Midwest. I always tell people it's a nice break, there's a different pace to life. I think where I'm from, it's very busy, traffic is an hour and a half. Here, you can get anywhere in 15 minutes, like, come on. I definitely enjoy it." Participant #11*

**A profound sense of belongingness derives from the involvement in professional endeavors, contributions to the Hispanic/Latino community in St. Louis, and preservation of the culture**

*"They took me to events at the Hispanic Chamber, introducing me to a lot of the folks. I started to build my network there and find a sense of place and belonging." Participant #11*

*"When I was approached by St. Louis Magazine to be on their best-dressed issue it was a confirmation you can easily get noticed when you do the right things. You have more chances to make an impact in St. Louis. Sometimes it's easy to say oh that's superficial, but the reason I started Instagram is to connect with people. I was so lonely at first. It's just the synergy of how things happen. It's more of the appreciation and how St. Louis has the St. Louis Fashion Fund. Fashion needs to pay the bills so this is when I felt included and seen. Any time I'm included in any project or consult with me or even older members of some board that I'm either on or part of makes me feel like I belong. I feel appreciated when people ask me for advice." Participant #3*

*"I serve on the Board of many cultural events; I've served in several executive positions to help advance economic mobility in our region. Recently, I've been hired by the International Institute to help create opportunities for the Latino community in St. Louis. I am heavily involved and participate in whatever I can. I also bring my family into these functions and roles." Participant #4*

*"The Puerto Rican society, I started going more now. I mean, this year 2023- 2024. Cause I wanted to know more Puerto Ricans." Participant #6*

*"I'm involved with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and participate in their Hispanic Leadership program; I am a member of the Hispanic Leaders Group and part of Incarnate Word (Catholic Church). I like to identify myself as Cuban/Hispanic and being engaged in the Hispanic community is important to me. Knowing there are Hispanic communities here from associations and cultural associations that do a lot of work that create that culture here." Participant #8*

*"The Churches that have Spanish Mass have also created systems of inclusion. St. Cecelia and some Churches in Bridgeton, St. Charles, and in North County are important as many people are Catholic and build their identity and community around their faith." Participant #4*

*"Maybe it was a feeling, right? Like, when we came they were all hourly workers in a manufacturing plant, and here I was now working with Latino professionals from Boeing and Centene and Bank of America and Monsanto, and all the stuff. So, I don't know if that was different, too, you know, like the empowerment or the feeling of belonging in a community that I was able to create this second time around. And another way that I feel that I belong, you know, in St. Louis, being able to have started the nonprofit, and people call and ask for us to be a part of things, or need our help in order to reach Spanish speakers, because the reality is even during*

*the pandemic, and we are only 4 years old; we still have the largest audience of Spanish speakers than any of the longstanding organizations, but that's because that was our intent was just Spanish speakers, right.” Participant #7*

### **C. CHALLENGES FOR HISPANICS/LATINOS IN ST. LOUIS**

#### **The desegregation of Latino communities in St. Louis presents a major challenge for the effective construction and maintenance of social networks**

*“Made a public Instagram account to connect in STL. It’s hard to make friends in St. Louis - there are bubbles. Took at least Five years to feel included - being on more boards and connecting with people. The adjustment process takes a little longer. Everything is fragmented - you have to look for it. You really don’t have neighborhoods with specific cultures like that Latino population.” Participant #3*

*“The Hispanic/Latino population is not in the same sector. They are spread around the Metro area. We are everywhere to approach everybody because everybody is spread.” Participant #10*

#### **Language and cultural barriers make the adaptation process more difficult for Hispanics/Latinos in St. Louis**

*“This may not be the case for everyone, but for me personally, I have surrounded myself with successful people who speak my language.” Participant #4*

*“In the first year, it was really challenging practicing medicine in a different language. I think, I was the only one from neurology, that I know, who did her training in Puerto Rico and then came here. And the language was tough...when you practice medicine, you develop a script over time of how you say things. I didn't have that, and it took me a while to develop it while I was getting adjusted to a different culture, and line of work.” Participant #6*

*“I have people who, whenever I'm speaking to them, I see them paying a lot of attention to my lips because they're trying to read and trying to understand what I'm trying to say” Participant #5*

*“Most [people] in our community don’t speak English, and sometimes they can't find help. You will see many agencies to help here, but they don't have people that speak Spanish, and our clients don't speak English, 90% don't speak English.” Participant #9,*

*“Well, language access has to be one of my main soap box moments. Not necessarily because I need it, but because I understand that our community does. And during the pandemic, we saw that firsthand. Because the infection rate in the Latino community was at 50%. But we only make up 4 to 5% of the population, right? But they forget that we are the essential workers. We are the families that can't isolate because there's so many of us living together. We are the ones that cannot take a day off of work because our jobs are only paid if we're in person.” Participant #7*



*“I prepare my answers and memorized the answers because as I was saying, I wasn't comfortable with my English. I memorized my answers by writing them down.” Participant #10*

**The unawareness of resources and the lack of support perception are barriers to the attraction and retention of work-authorized Hispanics/Latinos in the St. Louis region**

*“Yes, they are resources. the [my\_Company] is one of them. And there are other organizations as well. I don't know if the hard part is to get into these communities. Participant #10*

*“I had to figure that out by myself. The only help I got was from this friend of mine. We look at crime rates. We look at heat maps. We looked at school ratings. And ultimately, yes, we went ahead and asked around and searched for a couple of places to stay until we finally had an eligible winner. But no, nobody was there to help me. I had no idea where I was heading. I could pretty much just take a gamble and live in the Ghetto.” Participant #5*

*“I didn't look for it either. Maybe I should have. I feel like I just try to figure it out on my own. But yeah, I didn't work with anyone.” Participant #6*

## Appendix B: Research Study Propositions Summary

Proposition	Result
1. Hispanic/Latino immigrants will be encouraged to come and stay in St. Louis if they see educational and job opportunities to support their families	Supported  91% of the participants mentioned job opportunities as a driver to St. Louis and as a reason to stay in the region.  Driver- 32 references  Retainer- 27 references
2. Hispanic/Latino immigrants will be encouraged to come and stay in St. Louis if entrepreneurship opportunities and friendly government policies for immigrant participation in the economy are present in a region.	Marginally Supported  Participants highlighted the need for better incentives and easier processes for entrepreneurs.
3. Hispanic/Latino work-authorized immigrants look for the quality of life, including legal, health, finance, housing, transportation, safety, faith, and sports amenities/assets that they can engage with.	Supported  83% of the participants mentioned the quality of life as a reason to consider St. Louis and as a reason to stay in the region.  Driver- 12 references  Retainer- 16 references
4. Hispanic/Latino work-authorized immigrants look for social and cultural belongingness while retaining their uniqueness.	Supported  83% of participants cited feelings of acceptance and belonging as key reasons for choosing to stay in St. Louis. Although the value placed on their uniqueness was not always explicitly recognized in their experiences and interactions, the sense of belonging and acceptance was particularly significant for them as professionals.  References- 61