Connecting CUs to Serve Hispanics

Juntos Avanzamos program expands nationwide to meet Hispanics’ financial needs.

A program that brings together credit unions committed to serving the Hispanic market is expanding nationwide with the goal to provide financial products and services in a safe, trustworthy environment.

Created in 2005 by the former Texas Credit Union League, Juntos Avanzamos (Together We Advance) works to ensure credit unions have adequate policies, procedures, products, and services to meet the financial needs of Hispanics, a growing—and underserved—group, says Pablo DeFillipi, vice president of membership and business development for the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions.

Last September, the Cornerstone Credit Union League and the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions announced they would begin working together to bring the program to interested credit unions across the country.

“The national expansion of Juntos Avanzamos is the result of the convergence of two credit union organizations committed to financial inclusion and who recognized the need for a national framework to connect credit unions serving the Hispanic market in general and the immigrant market in particular,” DeFillipi says.

While open to all interested credit unions, the Federation is implementing a “controlled roll out” of the program, focusing its efforts on the Southwest, DeFillipi says.

As of December, the program included more than 30 credit unions in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Washington. Another five are seeking certification.

Vantage West Credit Union was the first credit union in Arizona to receive the Juntos Avanzamos designation. The Tucson, Ariz.-based credit union has been serving members for more than 60 years in communities where Hispanics make up 30% of the population, says Allan Switalski, vice president of marketing for the $1.5 billion asset credit union.

The credit union is focusing on understanding the Hispanic community in Arizona, serving the market with products that are relevant to the various segments, and marketing to millennials, Switalski says.

The designation not only allows the credit union to fly the Juntos Avanzamos flag in front of its buildings, but Switalski says it allows the credit union to better highlight the ways it serves the Hispanic community through culturally relevant efforts, including bilingual marketing campaigns and establishing a presence through partnerships with organizations that are meaningful to the Hispanic community.

“The Juntos Avanzamos recognition acknowledges the efforts we have already put into place and makes a statement about our commitment to continuing to find ways to better serve the Hispanic community,” Switalski says.

SCE FCU has served the Hispanic population, focusing on the neediest, for more than 10 years. The $630 million asset credit union includes a couple of branches in low-income, 100% Hispanic communities in Los Angeles, says George Poitou, chief operating officer of the Irwindale, Calif.-based credit union.

The designation allows SCE FCU to work collaboratively with other credit unions to institute new programs, initiatives, and procedures to continue to serve its Hispanic members, says Poitou.

“We’ve already been working with a number of other like-minded credit unions now part of the Juntos Avanzamos program informally by sharing successes and failures,” Poitou says.