

**Civic and Community  
Engagement of Filipinos in  
Chicago**

# **CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OF FILIPINOS IN CHICAGO**

**Final Report 2011**

**University of Illinois at Chicago**

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## Overview and Research Questions

This project addresses disparities in civic engagement and participation among Filipinos in Chicago. Studies of Filipino immigrant communities reveal that the kind of migration that has prioritized family reunification in the last decade has resulted in a large proportion of Filipinos entering the country with lower levels of educational, linguistic, and financial capital and who are funneled to low-wage work, with little chance of mobility. While many are involved in organizations, support hometown activities in the Philippines, and vote regularly in the U.S., they are less likely to participate in local neighborhood activities or be engaged in activities related to immigration reform. This project aims to understand the needs of this community that explain these disparities and identify ways of increasing or strengthening their civic engagement. In particular, the two research questions were: 1) What individual and structural factors influence and shape the scope and quality of civic and community engagement among Filipinos in Chicago? 2) How do Filipinos collectively define their community issues in ways that shape the forms of collective engagement they take to address them?

This multidisciplinary team of scholars from sociology, education, English, and Asian American Studies, in collaboration with two Filipino community organizations, the Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment (AFIRE) and the Center for Immigrant Resources and Community Arts (CIRCA)-Pintig, developed and implemented a series of innovative collective historicizing workshops, studied these workshops through ethnographic participant observations to understand how Filipinos define community issues, and conduct in-depth interviews of select workshop participants to further explore these issues. These workshops involve collecting stories that focus on shared histories and emphasize collective engagement in confronting structures of oppression and working for social change through multi-arts exercise and storytelling activities.

### DATA COLLECTED TO DATE

#### 1) WORKSHOPS

##### a. *Structure of the workshops*

We have conducted a total of three workshops. Two of them took place at UIC and one at the Vietnamese Association of Illinois (VAI) where CIRCA-Pintig shares an office space. We were able to get a total of 23 workshop participants (demographics described below) across all three workshops. This is a good number given some of the initial difficulties in recruitment. The response to the workshop participation was positive overall, but because the dates of the workshops were somewhat inflexible and based on the co-PIs schedules, the dates we selected did not work out for many of the interested individuals. The workshops, each lasting three hours, were facilitated by Jerry Clarito and Angela Mascarenas. They were conducted in English and videotaped. Anna Guevarra was present at all of the workshops and took ethnographic fieldnotes of the proceedings. In some cases, when there was an odd number of

participants needed for the exercises, the facilitators asked her to participate. Each participant filled out an informational survey prior to their participation in the workshops, which provided demographic information.

b. Module of the workshops:

All three workshops followed the following module that is modeled after CIRCA-Pintig's collective historicizing methodology and focused on the theme of Immigration

I. Orientation

A. Theme: Immigration

B. Objectives At the end of the 3-hour workshop, the participants would have:

1. Shared immigration-related issues through personal stories
2. Shared individual and collective responses to the issues
3. Identified commonalities among issues and responses shared
4. Reflected on individual's participation or lack thereof in addressing the issues
5. Identified collective ways of addressing the issues

II. Aesthetics

A. Exercises

1. Exercise1: Pepe & Pilar/Individual sharing of immigration story
2. Exercise2: Big-Group Sharing
3. Exercise3: Break-out into small groups & focus on one story per group
4. Exercise4: Share group story through improvisation

B. Group Reflection

Reflection Point: What one thing would you take away from the sharing & discussion? Why is this important to you?

C. Big Group Exercise: "Intervening" through Action / Changing the Situation

III. Organization: Synthesis Points

1. What were the common issues presented by the groups?
2. How were these issues addressed? Did they work or not? Why or Why not?
3. What were the differences between how the individuals approached the issues vs. how the group approached them?
4. Did your view of the issues change after the group process? If so, how? If not, why?
5. Having gone through this workshop, what would you do differently in addressing the issues raised?

c. Demographics of the workshop participants

- i. Gender: Female participants: N=12; Male participants: N=11
- ii. Age range: 25% were in their 30s and 25% in their 60s; youngest participant is 21 years old and oldest is 69 years old
- iii. Marital status: About 61% are married and about 22% are single/never been married

- iv. About 70% are born in the Philippines and 74% are U.S. citizens
- v. Education: About 52% are college graduates and 43% have pursued advanced degrees (masters, PhD, DDS, MBA); a majority except for three of them pursued degrees in the health, physical, and computer sciences
- vi. Employment: 61% are employed in the paid labor force with 22% earning \$80,000 or more

## 2) ETHNOGRAPHIC PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

Anna Guevarra was present at all of the workshops and primarily took fieldnotes of the proceedings. These fieldnotes aim to capture the nature and quality of the interactions among participants and between participants and facilitators, the questions that were raised, and the discussions/civic reflections that transpired.

## 3) IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The other component of this project involves conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews of workshop participants who are willing to do so. All of the interviews are conducted by Anna Guevarra and they range in length—anywhere from 2 hours to three hours per interview. To date, a total of 17 interviews have been completed, with five more remaining. The goals of these interviews are: (1) to get to know each of the participants and the lived experiences that shape their perspectives; (2) to obtain additional context and explanation for the stories and issues that participants shared during the workshop; and (3) to obtain the participants' individual assessment and evaluation of the workshop proceedings.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS/SALIENT ISSUES: (\*NOTE: project is still ongoing)**

1) Participants' definition of "civic engagement": Definition varied but mostly revolved around engaging in activities that benefit another person or community. They believe that this can take numerous forms and is not only limited to political participation. It can include any activities that work towards the betterment of one's communities.

### 2) Level of community engagement

a. Level of participation in organizations: some of the participants are involved in organizations that range from church groups, cultural foundations, student associations, alumni associations, Philippine regional organizations, and entertainment bands

#### b. Range of activities that they participate in:

- i. An overwhelming number (78%) participate in the "simbang gabi"—evening mass—during the holidays
- ii. About 65% claimed to have been involved in volunteering activities
- iii. Over half of them (56%) vote in U.S. elections and only one of them claimed to have voted in Philippine elections
- iv. Over half (52%) participate in Philippine Independence Day events
- v. About 35% participated in immigration rallies
- vi. Other activities: medical missions, health fairs, citizenship workshops, literary events

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- 3) Factors that influence and shape the scope and quality of civic and community engagement among Filipinos in Chicago
  - a. History of community involvement and activism
  - b. Social Value orientation
  - c. Involvement in Filipino American organizations
  - d. Experience of discrimination
  - e. Immigration history
  - f. Awareness of issues/problems
  - g. Collective spirit (“Bayanihan”)
  - h. Trust in the leadership
  - i. Sense of urgency
  - j. American Dream—diminishes the sense of collective spirit among Filipinos
  
- 4) Ways that Filipinos collectively define their community issues so as to shape the forms of collective engagement that they take to address them
  - a. Relevance of an issue to their lives and history (“loss of relevance” as a barrier for some); sense of connection to an issue
  - b. Sense that they have a “role” in the process, that they have the skills and knowledge to contribute to an activity and to a larger movement
  - c. Social networks
  
- 5) Method of collective historicizing provides insights on factors that impact engagement:
  - a. Importance of presenting a compelling story
  - b. Leadership and authoritative figures
  - c. Clarity of goals with respect to an activity
  - d. People involved/potential collaborators in an activity
  - e. The likelihood of intervening is guided by having opportunities to “rehearse” the situations and providing people with the tools to be able to intervene
  - f. Community organizing is intentional: Community organizers have an important role in getting participants to “connect the dots” (to frame an issue, to create a landscape where people will engage with issues and be motivated to action and intervention)
  - g. Civic engagement is a continual, evolving process that requires different actors and levels
    - i. Can enter the process at any point
    - ii. Self-reflection and constant interrogation needed
    - iii. “Intentional interruptions:” The issue is not so much that people are not engaged but rather that we have not established a connection among issues— people do not see the connections and therefore, they are less likely to be compelled to act
    - iv. Questioning of the process