

National Hispanic Environmental Council



“OPENING THE DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY” FOR LATINOS – NHEC SPONSORED EVENTS

Latinos are still under-represented in nearly every facet of the environment, and our voices are still not fully heard at the environmental decision-making table.

Given this, NHEC works hard to help open the doors of opportunity for Latinos and other minorities. We do this in a variety of ways, including sponsoring and/or co-convening briefings, mini-summits, roundtables, and other events designed to bring Latino leaders together with key federal officials and green group decision-makers. Further, NHEC is actively involved in planning and implementing these roundtables; we do not simply “lend our name”. We work in partnership to ensure Latino issues are substantively raised, discussed, and acted on.

These events help foster dialogue, share information, offer solutions, and increase networking amongst the participants. NHEC’s events provide an invaluable opportunity in a structured setting to help advance a “Latino agenda” in policymaking and program delivery in every environmental, natural resource, and energy field, especially at the national level.

In the last several years, NHEC has convened a number of events that brought key Latino national/community leaders; environmental issue experts; and academics together with senior federal officials. At these meetings, there was substantive discussion on the top issues impacting our community, followed by a frank exchange of the problems and possible solutions.

Here is a sampling of recent examples:

On February 23, 2010, **NHEC co-convened, together with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, the first ever “National Roundtable on Opportunities for Latinos in Natural Resources at USDA”.**

Held at USDA headquarters, this highly successful event brought together 30 national and regional Latino organizations with top officials from all of USDA’s natural resource agencies for briefings on and discussions about opening the doors of opportunity for Hispanics in employment, education, and minority business.

The result has been on-going engagement by NHEC and other Latino organizations with top officials in these natural resource agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This dialogue has resulted in a number of actions taken by these agencies to address a variety of Latino concerns, especially in outreach and hiring. This initiative, begun in 2010, continued into 2011 and is on-going still.

Similarly, **NHEC and U.S. EPA partnered to co-convene a “National Latino Roundtable—A Conversation with Lisa Jackson” on Nov. 10, 2010** at U.S. EPA headquarters, with over 40 Latino leaders.

Administrator Jackson participated at length, as did a range of top officials representing nearly every major EPA program office. This Roundtable -- featuring the Administrator engaging with top Latino leaders -- was one of the first events of its kind.

The leaders present discussed a variety of environmental policy issues with Administrator Jackson and senior EPA officials, such as climate change, environmental justice, and environmental health, and especially how these issues impact the Latino community. EPA had a chance to lay out its plans for addressing these concerns, and received valuable input into their planning. There has been useful follow-up discussions with and resulting action by EPA based on this Roundtable.

Similarly, NHEC also convened a meeting with top minority leaders and senior officials at the U.S. Dept. of Interior (DOI). Held in May 2009, early in the Obama Administration, this briefing/dialogue gave over 30 national Latino, African American, Asian American, and Native American leaders a chance to meet incoming Obama Administration officials. Further, the dialogue provided these top officials with the views of the major minority organizations on a range of issues, including minority outreach, hiring, youth programs, and ways in which people of color could be involved in the on-going stimulus program.

Through these and similar events over the years, NHEC works hard to open the doors of opportunity for Latinos in federal environmental agencies. These roundtables and more have given our community a chance to have a seat at the national environmental decision-making table, and to ensure we speak for ourselves on vital environmental issues.

Other NHEC events are planned for 2011 and 2012. Stay tuned!