THE COLORADO ORGANIZATION FOR LATINA OPPORTUNITY AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

COLOR is one of the youngest organizations in this book. It was founded in 1998 by seven deeply committed sexual and reproductive health practitioners and activists who were "troubled by the high teenage birth rate and high HIV rate among Latinas." Their mission is "to educate on, advocate for, and promote quality of health and reproductive rights for the sisterhood of Latinas. Through direct service, education, and outreach, each of COLOR's actions promotes awareness of Latina reproductive rights and aims to improve the quality of reproductive health care received by Latinas." COLOR is a grassroots organization with a broad agenda. It plays a central role in mainstream reproductive rights politics in Colorado and, increasingly, at a national level, while simultaneously developing a uniquely Latina voice and approach to reproductive health issues.

Latinas/os are the largest minority group in Colorado—17.1 percent and 31.7 percent of Colorado's and Denver's populations, respectively—yet they receive the poorest health care in the state. The conditions are so dismal that COLOR often refers to them as "epidemic."

Many of COLOR's founders worked in teen pregnancy and STD/HIV prevention and witnessed firsthand the difficulties Latinas face when seeking reproductive care. Most became politically active because of the high incidence of young motherhood in their community. Gloria Sanchez, a founding member of COLOR who grew up during the time of the Chicano movement in Denver, was committed to the organization because of her experiences working with young mothers:

**This chapter was researched and written by Elena R. Gutierrez.**
I used to work with teenagers, girls who got pregnant. And I would talk to them, and one girl told me one time, "I never even saw a penis until my son was born." I was talking with another girl at the high school one time and she told me that she had got pregnant when she was 13 and she said that her mom called her a bitch, a whore, a slut, all these things. And then I asked her, I said, "did she talk to you about birth control or anything?" She said, "Oh, no, I didn't even want to have sex." She was pretty much forced; she said it was "kind of like rape." I said, "But did you ever tell your mom that, that he had forced you?" She said "oh no, I just took it all. I just let my mom think that I was a slut, and all those kinds of things." So it was those kinds of conversations that I had with teens that really made me believe in the work that COLOR was doing.  

Other founding members had similar experiences while working with Latina youth groups and pregnancy prevention. Charlene Ortiz, who had her first child when she was a teen, ran young women's intervention groups at Planned Parenthood. Two of her brothers died after becoming HIV-positive. Melanie Herrera Bortz's mother had an arranged marriage. She had 8 living children out of 12 pregnancies.  

While my mother had different aspirations, she never questioned my father, and never had control over her own fertility...But this was how she was raised, and she felt that this was what she should do...I saw how lack of choice affected my mother, and I want to ensure that Latinas have what they need to control their own bodies.  

As these examples illustrate, COLOR members aren't just motivated by abstract health statistics, but by their own experiences as Latinas in the United States.

Drawing from this knowledge, COLOR asserts that the poor health status of Latinas is a result of social oppression and consequently places social justice at the heart of its mission. Its members believe that reproductive and sexual rights are central to achieving full equity and opportunity for Latinas/os in the United States, and that Latinas have the fundamental right to determine their reproductive experiences. COLOR's board president, Herrera Bortz, explains: "Having the right to control your body is no different than having the right to vote, or having the right to practice the religion of your choice or freedom of speech." COLOR's members consider their efforts part of a long legacy of activism to achieve social, political, and economic
equality for Latina/o communities. In fact, COLOR's very existence is a direct result of previous Latina organizing for sexual and reproductive health rights.

Origins

Three founding members of COLOR—Melanie Herrera Bortz, Charlene Ortiz, and Flora Rodriguez Russel—first met in 1996 at a forum sponsored by the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Previously unacquainted, the women had much in common. They all lived in Denver and were already professionally and politically involved in Latina/o health education and advocacy work. Herrera Bortz was then working at the Latin American Research and Service Organization. Ortiz and Rodriguez Russel both worked at the Denver Department of Public Health and Hospitals. Ortiz had worked for over 13 years in the areas of HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, and teen pregnancy. Rodriguez Russel was also a lawyer, longtime activist in reproductive rights, and board member of the NLIRH.

The Southwest NLIRH forum was crucial to bringing together women who shared a commitment to improving the reproductive health status of Latinas, often for the first time. Ortiz recalled that during the forum the delegates worked closely together to devise a plan for improving Latina reproductive health in Colorado, and it was the "seed planting" of COLOR. Several attempts were made to continue the work begun at this forum when they returned to Denver. However, Colorado, like other NLIRH state caucuses, was having difficulty implementing the strategies developed at various forums. The NLIRH began to provide $5,000 dollars of seed money and on-site technical assistance to some delegations. In 1998, the NLIRH—Colorado Caucus was one of the first funded, with Rodriguez Russel asking, on behalf of the NLIRH, if Herrera Bortz would take leadership in establishing the state coalition. With Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains as its fiscal sponsor, and a total of $12,000 of financial support from the NLIRH, the group went to work to envision a strategy for organizing in Colorado.

In December 1999 the group separated from both NLIRH and Planned Parenthood and became an independent organization, taking the name Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR). Members of COLOR stressed that the move to independence was not meant to distance the group from the NLIRH. On the contrary, the NLIRH is indisputably considered the organizational abuela (grandmother) of COLOR by all its current members. COLOR members were motivated to independence by their
need to ensure regional control of the organization's agenda. Herrera Bortz described it this way:

I truly believe that communities know best, know their issues and their problems, and know what's best for them. I don't believe in top down. I definitely believe in local control. And not that NLIRH in any way was trying to guide us or tell us what we needed to do, but we felt in order to make COLOR part of Colorado—part of the community in this state—we needed our own issues that we focused on and our own name that we created ourselves.⁹

Although COLOR evolved into its own organization, members view the NLIRH as directly responsible for providing the conditions within which it was able to develop. COLOR is governed by an all-Latina board of directors.

A Latina Voice on Choice

"'Choice' is a very privileged word. We throw it around casually, but we must remember to stay aware of other cultures and their impact on women's choices," says Herrera Bortz.¹⁰

Of the organizations covered in this book, COLOR is one of those most directly involved with the mainstream reproductive rights movement. Providing a Latina voice in the mainstream reproductive health movement in Colorado is central to the group's mission. Each member of COLOR had previously experienced being the only Latina or woman of color in their respective organizations and agreed that little attention was being paid to the health crisis facing Latina/o communities. According to Herrera Bortz,

Latinas' health in general was being very ignored...There are so many problems around HIV infection rates, around teenage pregnancy and fertility rates that to me it has hit, in my opinion, epidemic proportions...And I didn't think there was enough of a voice in the pro-choice movement in this state to the point where there was not a Latina voice at all.¹¹

Founding board member Ortiz speaks to why Latinas needed their own organization:

We already knew that there were women out there to fight for reproductive rights...But they didn't look like us...All the fights were strong. They helped women overall, but they did not help Latinas specifically. And we have strong, cultural connections to our bodies, to our minds, and our
souls. We see that holistically. And not everyone sees that. And right away, that is who we are. And when you look at our health, and when you look at it holistically, and you have people who don’t connect all of those parts, . . . we just didn’t feel represented . . . There were pieces missing. I definitely acknowledge that those struggles, and those fights, clearly helped us, clearly, . . . but those other pieces were missing for us.12

COLOR members believe that Latinas themselves should define the issues important to their communities and how those issues should be handled. “Most mainstream reproductive rights work does not take place in the context of culture,” Herrera Bortz explained.13 Undeniably, they argue, their cultural context demands a broad perspective on reproductive health. COLOR literature states, “For many women, the term ‘pro-choice’ equals abortion. As Latinas, we approach reproductive health from many different perspectives and believe that being pro-choice also means being concerned about birth control, HIV/AIDS, and sexuality education as well as having safe access to abortion.”14

COLOR promotes a program that integrates body, mind, and spirit as important facets of Latina/o reproductive and sexual health. As Jacinta Montoya, a board member, conveys, “We look at it from a holistic viewpoint. So, having the physical and psychological abilities to get care and to have sexual relations if you choose, or not to have them, and also, choosing when and if to have a child.”15 While focusing upon the individual physical and spiritual influences that impact a Latina’s reproductive health, COLOR also recognizes that today most Latinas do not experience actual reproductive freedom because of economic and political barriers that limit their access.

Thus, a majority of the organization’s efforts reach beyond mainstream strategies to secure abortion rights that incorporate broader issues of access to culturally proficient health care for Latinas and their families. Its work currently focuses on the economic barriers that impact Latinas’ health and on developing a sexual and reproductive health curriculum for multigenerational Latina communities. It has recently completed a policy analysis of the harsh impacts of welfare reform on Latinas, and it is currently developing a comprehensive sexual education plan for Latina youth.

At the same time, many of COLOR’s projects sit squarely within the concerns of the mainstream reproductive rights movement, and several individual members are active in pro-choice efforts in Colorado in addition to their work with COLOR. As a member organization of the Protect Families, Protect Choice Coalition, a group of organizations
working together to defend abortion rights in the state, COLOR worked to defeat anti-choice ballot initiatives in the November 1998 and 2000 elections. The organization also took a lead role in the last four years of the annual Roe v. Wade Anniversary Pro-Choice Lobby and Rally Day. COLOR's contributions to this and subsequent events have demonstrated Latina leadership and organizing ability to the pro-choice community of Colorado. According to Herrera Bortz, COLOR's work is important not just for Latinas and the organization itself but for the mainstream reproductive rights movement:

Not only does it bring visibility to the organization, but it also provides an opportunity for white women to see that Latinas are involved in this movement, and I think that far outweighs anything else. Even though there aren't many Latinas who go yet, it's getting into their psyche that they are not the only ones in this movement. And moreover, it may also influence more women of color to join the movement.¹⁶

Not everyone in COLOR would agree with Herrera Bortz, as some members are ambivalent about whether or not Latinas should be involved with mainstream reproductive rights organizations. Similar to the experiences of other women of color, much of the ambivalence stems from COLOR members' belief that struggles for reproductive freedom must move beyond the narrow focus on abortion rights. However, most members think that the larger mainstream movement and COLOR can have mutually beneficial relationships. This is particularly critical in a state such as Colorado, where they must constantly defend themselves against conservative forces. Montoya points out, "Since [Colorado] is so conservative, and since the anti-choice community has vowed to bring legislation every two years, we know there's a constant battle there against choice. So there are those common issues that we can work on with the mainstream community, and be more effective."¹⁷ COLOR thus attempts to educate mainstream reproductive rights activists as they work with them against anti-choice forces in the state.

Organizational Culture

COLOR's board members envisioned an organization infused with Latino cultural values, something different from what they could experience in the mainstream. From the outset, they adopted many of the practices used in razalogía, a Chicano approach to community learning focusing on transformative knowledge and cultural activism. Razalogía, which means "knowledge of and for the people," was first practiced during the 1970s by Chicano activists seeking to understand
how Mexican Americans could effect social transformation. In contrast to individualistic models of knowledge attainment, it sees learning and knowledge as a communal process which should be used toward the purpose of community healing and creating a more just society. One of the core principles of razalogía is that all individuals can strive toward social justice by drawing from their own experiences and knowledge of self. Through shared realization of internalized oppression, it is believed many can come to awareness of their personal value and group power and then utilize this knowledge to work together for social change.

Razalogía employs conocimiento as the most basic principle of the group. Conocimiento helps people to learn how to see their “common unity” as an enhancement of personal and group power. According to razalogía’s founders,

The Conocimiento Principle recognizes that common unity begins with the process of shared awareness and understanding, or conocimiento. In essence, we must learn the basics of who each person is before we can evolve the trust and bonding required for unity and shared group power. With this principle in mind, all group efforts balance the focus on a task with a conscious effort to maximize relationships of shared awareness among participants.

COLOR has adopted this principle as a core tenet, as it strives to bring women who often come from very different backgrounds to work together. Ortiz, a razalogía trainer, introduced the process to the group.

We use that model because it incorporates values—Latino values. And the very, very first value that we put on is conocimiento, which is “to get to know you.” And we basically say that this is who we are. And in our community, if we know where you are, and we can get a picture of where you come from, we’ll know who you are. So, we do that amongst each other, and... it allows us to start opening up. There’s a connection there because we know what our cultures are like. And [the] mainstream doesn’t do that.

The conocimiento exercise is used when new people join the organization, giving members the opportunity to tell each other who they are and to learn about one another. Through this naturalized process of culturally based community building, members are able to acknowledge the similarities and differences each of them brings to Latina reproductive political activism. They are able to achieve an increased commitment to action after sharing in the process of
realizing that they are not alone; they are part of a community and can learn from each other and work together to enact social change.

Based upon this framework, COLOR promotes the idea that all members of the organization are leaders, and that each person has unique skills, abilities, and contributions to make. All members are empowered and expected to take responsibility for significant tasks, and leadership development and skills building of the board members, staff, and volunteers are part of the organization's core commitments. In this way, the organization contributes to both movement and community development through building the capacity and abilities of each one of its members. While put into practice at every level, implementation of these values is particularly evident in the group's strategic planning and yearly work plan process, which every member is expected to participate and lead in.

**Strategic Planning**

During the NLIRH–Colorado Caucus strategic planning process, members met monthly for a year to develop a budget and define a mission, goals, and infrastructure for the organization. Herrera Bortz led the group through the process of constructing a mission and vision statement and developing a five-year work plan. This was challenging for many. Although most members were sexual and reproductive health direct services providers and activists, only one had previous board experience. Herrera Bortz describes how the arduous and sometimes overwhelming process became a tool of empowerment:

Some people had a hard time with that process. [They were saying] "Where do I fit in here? I don't understand what my role is!" "I don't get this strategic plan. How do I do this?" And my response to them was, "In your job, at some point, you're going to have to sit down with your board or with your boss and you're going to have to work on a strategic plan. So right now, you're learning what a strategic plan is. So you can take the tools that you learned here, and apply them in the real world." In my opinion, that is one way for Latinas to have even more power...They come to the table, they know how to form a goal, and they know how to develop a mission statement, and they know what an objective is, and they know what time lines are, and they know what evaluation means. To me, that is power. To me, that is knowledge. And to me, knowledge is power. And so that's how I explained it to women who were frustrated. And some of them stayed. And they are still there at the table.
As Herrera Bortz suggests, for many board members, feelings of accomplishment, "ownership" of the organization, the sense of "making a difference," and feeling part of a community were fostered through the strategic planning process. This is particularly significant, as many of the board members felt alienated from these important processes when working within mainstream organizations. Montoya explains:

Even though the strategic planning was so mind numbing, you could see results. We had a mission statement, we had a name, we had the things that you need, the foundation, the infrastructure that you need in order to have an organization. And I felt like I was making more of a difference. I'm having problems with Planned Parenthood right now, because I don't see where I can really affect much change, or contribute very much. Whereas with COLOR all along, my ideas have been listened to, and I've had input, and we've been forming an infrastructure, and doing stuff, which is really important, is actually taking action.22

Other COLOR members also experienced the unique satisfaction that came from completing the strategic planning process. Like Montoya, many had worked within mainstream reproductive rights organizations but felt that they were not able to be as involved as they would have liked. Core Latino values of razalogía—community learning, empowerment, and social change—and conocimiento—shared awareness of each other's abilities and culture—were integrated and actively present in COLOR's organizational planning.

Healthy Women, Healthy Families, and Future Programming

COLOR's first major programmatic effort was a media campaign for the Latino community that it launched in the fall of 2002. Designed to raise social awareness of the importance of Latina health issues, the campaign also aimed to more formally introduce COLOR and its mission to the community. The first priority of the campaign was to focus on the community's needs, as identified by the community.23 Because of the lack of academic scholarship on Latina health, members felt that they needed to conduct their own community research to design an effective campaign. A volunteer with a PhD in anthropology trained COLOR members in some basic skills of social science research. Members then conducted a series of focus groups in both English and Spanish to canvass the needs community women expressed around issues of reproductive health.
Based on the focus groups, COLOR designed the media campaign with a simple message: the crucial connection between the health of a mother and the health of the entire family. The tag line that the group created, “Healthy Women, Healthy Families,” stressed that because women are often mothers who care for many people, their health and well-being are crucial to maintaining the health of all other members of the family. COLOR members believed that focusing on the family was the best way to introduce issues of women’s health into Latino communities, and all phases of the campaign focused on this general point. Drawing this message directly from focus group participants, COLOR developed and promoted a campaign directly responsive to the community, with the hope that the message would resonate more effectively.

The campaign promoted the Latina Information Line, a bilingual referral service offering information on abortion providers, safe sex practices, and general information about COLOR. The organization also developed a brochure listing resources in Colorado, including community health clinics, rape awareness and assistance, battered women’s shelters, and places for getting HIV testing.

Based on the success of “Healthy Women, Healthy Families” and feedback from community members, COLOR has created Lesbianas Latinas Para la Salud Reproductiva (Latina Lesbians for Reproductive Health). COLOR is aware that Latina lesbians access health care and routine gynecological services less often than others and are therefore less likely to receive regular screening exams. The project promotes knowledge and awareness around reproductive health, particularly breast cancer, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and domestic violence. That the initiative was proposed to the group by a community member who was also a COLOR volunteer and has now come to fruition speaks both to the success of the media campaign and COLOR’s visionary leadership. It not only significantly raised individual awareness of COLOR and its commitment to promoting health in Latino communities but also provided a forum for further community-driven work and health promotion to occur. Moreover, the program is unique in its explicit integration of issues of sexuality and lesbianism into a Latina reproductive health framework. This is notable, as COLOR is organizing in one of the most conservative states in the nation.

Education, Representation, and Transformation

As COLOR’s primary goal is to promote awareness of Latina reproductive health and rights, its main programmatic efforts focus on education. COLOR members have spoken at numerous professional
and community organizations and national forums. In Denver, advocates and volunteers take a Latina perspective into the policy arena through their volunteer work with other organizations and networking. Although their broad directive offers distinct challenges, COLOR advocates believe that it is the only way to make effective change. As former board member Elicia Gonzales states, “We’re trying to educate Latinas, and then the larger community, which are very different, but both important if we’re going to enact any change.”

As board president, Herrera Bortz represents the organization both nationally and in the Colorado community. She gives several presentations per year on the status of Latina reproductive health to Latina/o and mainstream reproductive rights organizations alike. COLOR’s commitment to educating mainstream organizations about Latina issues is reflected in Herrera Bortz’s presentations to Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America. At a Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains training, Herrera Bortz presented “Is Choice a Diversities Issue?” which emphasized the cultural values that influence how Latinas make health choices, and how those decision-making processes influence their reproductive health. Often COLOR’s work includes providing basic education on who Latinas/os are, and the diversity of experiences that fit within this category. Herrera Bortz explains that many times members of the general public are unaware that Latinas/os are a diverse group:

In Denver there’s this whole myth that we are homogene- neous...And we’re not. And so that’s very clear and evident to me. But I don’t think it’s evident to non-Latinos and so I try to educate people on that. Every time I do a talk, I talk about demographics and subgroups and so forth to make people realize that. And people always thank me for that, they always come to me and say, “Oh, I was unaware, I didn’t know.”

Much of the work of promoting awareness of Latina reproductive health and rights occurs less formally, outside of specific COLOR directives. Since COLOR board members are involved with several other health and community organizations, they have been able to introduce Latina perspectives on reproductive politics to a larger audience through the other organizations they are associated with. In both paid and volunteer work, COLOR members increase awareness of and promote culturally proficient services for Latinas and their families, using tools such as networking and education. COLOR members are able to bring a critical Latina lens to all aspects of their work. For example, Darci Martinez was a COLOR board member for just over two years and also the manager of a local Planned Parenthood clinic.
In that role, Martinez was always sure to educate the staff about the particularity of serving Latina clients: “I constantly try to bring to my senior staff the status of women in our community right now. Open your eyes; look at the issues. Just bring it to the table. I think COLOR does that more than anything, makes people aware.”27 While each of these efforts is not part of a deliberate strategy employed by COLOR, all board members are expected to be present and actively advocate on behalf of Latina reproductive health in whatever capacity they can.

**COLOR’s Significance**

COLOR has accomplished much in its first six years. In addition to its programmatic work, members have built a solid infrastructure essential to COLOR’s long-term viability. All members are proud of the work they have accomplished, are incredibly fond of the organization, share mutual respect for each other, and have experienced a bond that has been absent in their other working relationships. Elicia Gonzales explains, “We all had such different backgrounds, but similarities too. It felt more like a family than any other group I’ve been in.”28 This close relationship has undeniably enabled the group to accomplish all the work that it has despite its limited resources.

COLOR has also stayed true to its goal of building leaders in the movement through skills building and training. In the process of fighting for reproductive health equity and bringing awareness to the health status of Latinas in Colorado and in the nation in general, COLOR simultaneously provides a place where Latina health professionals and activists find a supportive community where they can develop their organizing skills. This training has been crucial for all COLOR members, as they have found that mobilizing around Latinas’ diverse reproductive needs is indeed challenging.

While attracting and retaining members and funding presents a significant challenge for most nonprofit organizations, the complications surrounding Latina reproductive politics can be additionally weighty. Part of this is the complexity of Latina reproductive health politics. As board member Montoya states,

> We’re fighting a battle on many fronts, because we’re fighting the sexism that exists in the Latino community, and we’re fighting the racism that exists in the pro-choice community, and all of those things make it hard to attract members, and to attract funding and to move forward.29

Indeed, the pure breadthness of the categories the group is trying to encompass—Latinas and reproductive and sexual health and rights—provide seemingly endless issues to work on. Moreover,
COLOR's vision considers reproductive health issues from the multiple standpoints of Latina lives. Montoya explains:

It's kind of broad when we think of it. It's Latinas, so women from preteen up to grandma age, from all walks of life, recent immigrants up to people who have been here for generations, Spanish speakers and English speakers. Because I think that although a big array of people have different roadblocks to access to reproductive health, there's roadblocks all the way.\(^{30}\)

As her reflections indicate, one of the challenges COLOR faces in its work is the large and diverse constituency. At the same time, it is forced to decide where to place the energies of the few individuals who carry on the work. Currently, there are simply not enough board members or volunteers to do all of the work that is necessary for the organization to grow. According to board member Gloria Sanchez, “[We] definitely need to recruit more members, and do more to keep more.”\(^{31}\)

All board members are aware that their capacity to effect change is hindered by their small size. On the other hand, since board members are also the organization's primary workers, they are clear that incoming members need to be able to commit the hours and energy necessary to do the hard work of the organization. Although limited resources are sometimes frustrating, Herrera Bortz believes that acknowledging and accepting these limitations is important, especially for a relatively new organization, as it provides some context for the important successes they do have and some understanding for when they feel as if they are not doing enough. The decision to grow slowly, focusing more on infrastructure and less on recruiting and retaining members, has presented an additional challenge, as they acknowledged themselves in 2000.

An on-going problem with COLOR is recruitment. Due to the sensitive nature of being a Latina pro-choice organization many Latinas are unwilling to join. The reasons given by these women are that they feel that joining a pro-choice group will alienate them in the community and their jobs. We have accepted that the work we do can sometimes be controversial in our community, nevertheless we are committed to COLOR's mission.\(^{32}\)

Through their experience, board members found that while some women were reluctant to join a pro-choice organization, others became involved because of all of COLOR's non-abortion-related programming. Although drawn to these other issues, many eventually
leave because they experience personal conflict working on issues related to abortion.\textsuperscript{33}

Low retention may be something those working on issues of reproductive freedom within the Latina communities must accept until reproductive health outreach is more widely acceptable in those communities. Herrera Bortz encourages other members to focus on the commitment of those who do participate, not the numbers. However, organizations with small member bases and big agendas often struggle with burnout. For many who have been involved in COLOR since its inception, building a nonprofit has entailed many more long hours of hard work than they had initially expected. Because each member is involved in every part of any project, many admit to feeling overwhelmed by the amount of time they put in. However, many stay committed for fear that if they do not do it, no one else will pick up this crucial work. There is concern that there is not a large pool of activists to replace them, which constantly reinforces that training the next generation of Latina leadership is also a critical part of their mission.

Another possible contributor to the lack of retention may be the stage COLOR is at in its development. COLOR has been able to start, maintain, and grow with a strong organizational infrastructure—something often neglected in newly started nonprofits. New nonprofits tend to focus more on the programs they want to institute and less on structure, which often leads to the demise of an organization. COLOR founders wanted to avoid that pattern, so they spent much of the group's first few years of existence establishing the infrastructure and ensuring that programming was of a high quality. Though it had the support of a larger, more experienced organization, in many ways, COLOR started from scratch and learned the skills of institutional development while building an organization from the ground up. This has resulted in a strong foundation and the empowerment of individual members but has led to varying degrees of burnout for some. It also likely contributed to the dropping out of individuals who were not able to make the same commitment of time and energy or who were not drawn to the work of organizational development. In the future, COLOR must think about how to integrate, utilize, and build community with those who have different strengths and abilities.

As Montoya suggested earlier, the lack of availability of funding for abortion and reproductive rights work also challenges the continuation of COLOR's work. Although COLOR has solicited funding from prominent Latino organizations, its requests have been denied because many Latino organizations are unwilling to promote a reproductive rights agenda for fear of alienation from Latina/o community members. According to Herrera Bortz, "It's limiting to be pro-choice
because it really impacts funding. I can’t tell you how many requests have been turned down, especially from Latinos...Two Latino-based funding requests were turned down. I know it’s because we are pro-choice.” With such limited foundation support available, COLOR must build up the donations and fundraising efforts of the organization.

The organization also needs to establish an independent organizational and work space. To date, all of the organizational files, materials, and supplies have been located at board member and staff homes. Many of the board members hope that they can change this situation as soon as possible. As Montoya states that having “a home base makes you feel permanent.”

Board members are additionally coming to realize that one person cannot shoulder all of the administrative, fundraising, and programmatic tasks of COLOR, even in a funded position. Other than a brief period during which the organization had a program manager, all of the administrative tasks, including grant writing, were done by Herrera Bortz and sometimes Montoya, COLOR’s incoming president. An independent office would complement their goal of spreading organizational responsibility among members. As a working board, individual members must commit to doing more of the day-to-day work of the organization. With the transition of Herrera Bortz from this position, the organization faces a lot of change. One of the group’s priorities should be to continue to develop the skills of the other board members.

While the organization has been recognized nationally, it plans to develop a presence and network in the larger region of the Southwest. A larger networking circle would not only bring the group visibility, but help them find support from similar organizations that may be able to provide an advisory role or possibilities for coalition work.

Toward this end, COLOR must develop broader outreach to other Latina communities so that the organization truly reflects a multidimensional Latina voice. At present, all board members are of Mexican origin, and most identify as Chicana, though past members have been of other Latino origins. While their composition reflects the predominance of Mexican-origin communities in Colorado, the group strives to more fully address the full range of Latina experiences.

COLOR has made significant contributions to Latina reproductive and sexual health. Centering its cultural values and putting them into practice, COLOR has indeed made major steps toward bringing awareness to Latina perspectives on reproductive and sexual health rights and developing culturally proficient curriculum and health care models that will benefit Latino communities. As a group working within mainstream reproductive rights circles, COLOR is also
developing a strong model of a culturally-based organization. In the process of fighting for reproductive health equity and bringing awareness to the status of Latinas in Colorado and in the nation in general, COLOR simultaneously provides an organizational forum within which Latina health professionals and activists have found mentorship and are learning organizational skills and capacity building.

COLOR is a direct descendant of past and current efforts to bring Latina voices to the table of organizing for reproductive and sexual health. It is determined to honor this legacy and continue this important work, despite the many challenges. As Herrera Bortz so effectively states, present conditions for the lives of many Latinas simply demand that the work must continue: “When the teenage pregnancy rate goes down and when Latinas do not have the highest HIV infection rate, when you know our women are getting prenatal care, and when our abortion rate goes down, then we’ll stop working.”37
NOTES

2  COLOR, “Mission Statement” (organizational files).
7  Charlene Ortiz, interview by Elena R. Gutiérrez, July 7, 2002.
8  Ibid.
9  Herrera Bortz, interview.
10  Ibid.
11  Ibid.
12  Ortiz, interview.
13  COLOR, “Profile.”
16  Herrera Bortz, interview.
17  Montoya, interview.
19  Ibid.
20  Ortiz, interview.
21  Herrera Bortz, interview.
22  Montoya, interview.
23  Ibid.
25  Herrera Bortz, interview.
26  A few of the organizations to which COLOR members belong are the Colorado Families Resource Network, the NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado, the Colorado Women’s Agenda, the Latino STD/HIV Advocacy Coalition, the HIV Resources Planning Council, Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains, and the Protect Families Protect Choice Coalition.
28  Gonzales, interview.
29  Montoya, interview.
30  Ibid.
31  Sanchez, interview.
The hard work and vision of COLOR members is indeed being recognized nationally. Herrera Bortz was granted a 2003 Gloria Steinem Women of Vision Award from the Ms. Foundation for Women in recognition of her work with COLOR and her tireless efforts to fight for the reproductive and sexual rights of Latinas.