

# Tenemos que hablar del Cinco de Mayo

## We need to talk about Cinco de Mayo

Hola,

The arrival of May means we will begin seeing beer and bar advertisements for Cinco de Mayo celebrations. While this US holiday seemingly celebrates Hispanic heritage, it is misunderstood and presents opportunity for misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and for folks to feel as if they are not included and don't belong. This means that while agencies may hold Cinco de Mayo events intending to be inclusive, these celebrations may be harmful or backfire.

Over the last few years, the Washington State Latino Leadership Network (LLN) has received multiple contacts from state employees concerned with or offended by Cinco de Mayo celebrations and advertisements. We're raising this issue for awareness so that we can more broadly address the issue.

### Some quick notes on Cinco de Mayo

- Cinco de Mayo is **not** Mexican Independence Day (that's September 16<sup>th</sup> and occurred 50 years before Cinco De Mayo).
- Cinco de Mayo commemorates the Mexican army's victory over France in 1862 at the Battle of Puebla.
- Outside of Puebla, Mexico largely does not celebrate Cinco De Mayo or recognize the day as a holiday.
- In the 1960's Chicano civil rights activists used Cinco de Mayo as a way to inspire the Latino community contributions and history.
- In the 1980's beer maker, Coors Brewing, provided a \$350 million donation to Latino organizations ending a long-standing boycott by Chicano activists. This began the shift to the current mass-marketed, commercialized fiesta seen today.

### Recommendations on inclusivity and Cinco de Mayo

If your agency or team is considering holding a Cinco de Mayo celebration, consider some of the following to provide a more inclusive work environment.

- Recognize that this is largely a US celebration, and the Latino community includes members from a wide variety of backgrounds and identities. Referring to any and every member of the Latino community as "Mexican" is harmful erasure.
- Review and update flyers or celebration materials for cultural appropriateness or offensive imagery. Just because you have seen similar décor in a restaurant does not



make it appropriate for a celebration in the workplace. (remember Cinco de Mayo isn't Mexican Independence Day)

- If an employee raises concerns about an event or flyer, listen to them and make changes to be more culturally sensitive.
- Consider holding an event during Hispanic Heritage month instead (September 15<sup>th</sup> – October 15<sup>th</sup>).
- Include employees who identify as Hispanic, Latino, Mexican-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, South American, Central American, others of Latino and Hispanic heritage and allies in the planning for Cinco de Mayo events.

While we recognize the intention may be to provide an inclusive environment or celebrate Mexican-American culture, the impact of stereotypical representation perpetuates othering and may have negative impacts on your belonging efforts.

Sincerely,

The Washington State Latino Leadership Network