A FUNDRAISING STRATEGY THAT DRAWS ITS INSPIRATION FROM A 400-YEAR-OLD MYSTICAL VISION

by Susan R. Shapiro and Tony Proscio

The little bridge that links the west side of San Antonio to the city's famous downtown has long been, to some observers, a kind of cultural symbol. It is not, like some bridges, a symbol of connection, but of separation.

"Although we're just a five-minute drive from downtown," says María Elena Torralva, executive director of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in West San Antonio, "the bridge, and that short drive, has been a kind of barrier, real or perceived," between the celebrated tourist centers of central San Antonio and the city's poorest neighborhood. The result, for many years, has been a kind of second-class status for the west side, and a resulting physical and economic decline that has begun only recently — with considerable local effort and leadership — to turn around.

Yet for every San Antonian who perceives the west side as, in Torralva's phrase, "the bad side of town," there are many others — especially the city's Latino residents — who see it as a historical and cultural center. To build on that fact, and to bridge the neighborhood's perceived separation from the rest of San Antonio, the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center began last year to create an artistic focal point, in the midst of a renovated plaza, adjoining a church and the neighborhood's rebounding commercial area. A newly commissioned mural, the Center decided, would be a visual and emotional rallying spot for the neighborhood, its businesses and institutions, its redevelopment efforts, the Latino diaspora across the whole central Texas region, and the cultural ties that link all these elements together. The muralist would be native West San Antonio artist Jesse Treviño, an internationally recognized artist with works in the Smithsonian Institution, the private collection of Britain's Prince Charles, and a roster of Fortune 500 corporations.

Death and rebirth

In 1970, as the west side's decline was accelerating, the closing of a historic movie theater became "a symbol of the life in this neighborhood — the cultural and the economic life — just shutting down," says Roger Carrillo, executive director of Avenida Guadalupe Association, the community development organization that renovated the plaza where the new mural will stand.

"Our board saw that theater," Carrillo explains, "as a center of Hispanic San Antonio. So they wanted to restore the original use of that business, and expand on it — not just for the performing arts but for arts of all kinds." They weren't alone: A young organization called the Performing Artist Nucleus, or PAN, had rented a small space in the theater and begun urging the City of San Antonio to renovate the building. Together, the Guadalupe Association and PAN won the day: The city completed the renovations in 1982. By that time, PAN had evolved into the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center — an organization with a mission broad enough to put the whole building to use, as the cultural heart of a new West San Antonio. Says Carrillo:

> An Arts Center maybe isn't the obvious first step [in a redevelopment program]. But in this community, where we were faced with a massive, ill-conceived housing project, where we saw a rise in delinquency and crime, we lost our parks and businesses and jobs, and families left because of all of this — here, our board believed that the way to recovery was to put it back the way it devolved. The very first thing that left was the arts and amenities, so that was where we were going to start. The very first thing [we rebuilt] was the cultural-arts theater, and at the same time, we also wanted a plaza. We wanted to start with a jewel — and Plaza Guadalupe and the Cultural Arts Center was that jewel.

Twenty years later, to polish that jewel and draw wider attention to what it signifies, the 40-foot-high mural will be literally an icon of unity and identity. It portrays *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, a vision of the Virgin Mary from the 16th century that is common to many Latino cultures and nationalities. The image portrays a vision that came to an Aztec peasant in 1531, in which the Virgin Mary was arrayed in a mixture of Indian and Christian iconography. Her message urged peace between native peoples and Spanish colonizers. In the vision, the Virgin promised that a new civilization, divinely inspired and protected, would emerge from the union of the two cultures. As Torralva describes it, the image of the *Virgen*

de Guadalupe over more than 400 years has stood for a combination of pride and inclusiveness, uniting people of different races and classes and melding the strengths of the European and American continents.

The story of the Guadalupe Center and its new mural is something more than a case of a community weaving cultural, religious, and economic development forces into a convincing whole. What further distinguishes the story of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center and West San Antonio is not just its vision of community renewal, but its approach to local *ownership* — residents' literal investment in the cultural, economic, and social phenomenon taking shape around the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, including people of every income level, ethnic identity, and length of time in the community.

"We are developing housing for families near the plaza," says Carrillo, where people will literally be setting up their lives in this spot. "Plus we've brought in businesses and created structures around this location to bring people back. There are restaurants around the plaza, a nonprofit agency has offices there, several service businesses like an attorney and a dentist. There's a mix of people of all types here. This is something people are drawn to and feel part of."

Membership, investment, and endowment

The key, for María Elena Torralva and the Arts Center, is that members of San Antonio's extended Latino community also feel part of the ownership. It is essential not only that the mural and the Guadalupe Center have the social and economic support of their neighbors, but that the local and extended community take *possession* of the whole cultural enterprise that the Center represents. That means, among other things, vastly expanding the base of members, contributors to the endowment and other long-term projects, and participants in the Center's programs. The goal is to cultivate a common ownership of the neighborhood and its institutions — not figurative, but literal — among even its poorer residents.

This is both an economic and a cultural challenge, she recognizes. For many immigrant families — particularly those from Mexico, many of them from rural and farmworking backgrounds — life in a U.S. city is a recent and still fragile phenom-

enon. A feeling of *belonging* in such a place, if it has been achieved at all, is still a novel and uneasy experience for many people. Among many of West San Antonio's families, this is the first generation to own a home, and many other families have yet to do so. Some still struggle with issues of immigration and citizenship. Others live on small incomes in uncertain jobs.

In short, it is a community where many neighbors are more closely tied to one another, and to a common cultural heritage, than to the place where they now live. That imbalance, say several leaders and residents in West San Antonio, will right itself over time. But it will happen sooner, Torralva believes, the more west siders see their homes, their businesses, and their common cultural treasures as extensions of themselves — personal stakes in the common wealth.

Building local ownership for local assets is thus one foundation of the Guadalupe Center's $7 million capital campaign. That total includes a $2 million addition to the institution's current $1.9 million endowment, a $1 million long-term fund for building maintenance, acquisition of property adjacent to the current facilities, elimination of current mortgages and other financial restructuring, and some $3 million to build a new education building.

To draw the attention of state and local leaders — and to boost residents' perceived "return" on their investment — the Guadalupe Center has received a $1 million grant from the Ford Foundation, to be matched dollar-for-dollar solely by contributions from individuals and families. Institutional donations — from corporations and foundations, city government, and other large donors — will also be an important part of the Center's overall campaign. But they aren't part of the Ford Foundation match, which is all about individual commitment and ownership.

The capital campaign's motto — "Share the Arts: *Dì que Sì!* [Say Yes!]" — focuses particularly on people's personal attachment to local and ethnic culture. Its message is more than just sentiment. Arts and culture are assets at risk throughout San Antonio and most of Texas, says Torralva, where state education budgets over the past several decades have brought about a severe reduction — in many places, an elimination — of arts education in the public schools. "Sharing the arts" in Texas — especially with children, but also with adult newcomers — is thus primarily a private and family endeavor. With its school of Latino arts and culture,

the Guadalupe Center has helped fill the gap and enlist families in the education process. But at 1,200 students a year, the school is filled to capacity, leaving many children unserved. The planned education building is therefore a centerpiece of the capital campaign — a first-rate school of the arts that community members will have invested in personally, making it, in a sense, an extension of their homes and families, as well as of a common culture.

For the staff and board of the Guadalupe Center, this emphasis on individual investment is as personal as for any member of the community. Board members have embraced a goal of contributing $200,000 toward the $1 million total — at least $2,000 per member over four years, with each of the 20 members recruiting at least four other people to contribute the same amount. Employees are contributing as well, in amounts proportional to their means. Board and staff members are the front lines in a personal appeal to residents of the neighborhood and the surrounding region. ("We're not quite ready to go national yet," says Torralva, "but eventually we will.")

Not only are the Center's board and staff contributing financially to the campaign, but they are developing new skills to sustain the campaign's accomplishments beyond its targeted completion in 2005. Additional training for board members and continuing on-the-job-learning during the fundraising process are meant to build an organization that is constantly establishing and improving relationships with potential contributors, members, and advocates. To reinforce that mission, the Center in 2001 added a full-time Director of Individual Giving — someone who had been a board member for six years and can now work both with the board and the 18 staff members to cultivate individual supporters.

Growing membership, rising targets

At the most basic level, saying Yes to the arts, and taking a shareholder's stake in the community's cultural heritage, means becoming a member of the institution. Although attendance at individual events is often overwhelming, income from ongoing memberships has not grown significantly in past years, with membership levels fluctuating around 500 individuals and fewer than a dozen businesses. Among the low-income residents of West San Antonio, memberships need to be affordable:

The average amount of an individual membership is $25, rising to $100 for business members. These low thresholds have meant that the Guadalupe Center receives less revenue from memberships than might be typical for a similar-sized institution elsewhere. That began to change in 2001, when Jesse Treviño's mural project and the Ford Foundation's matching grant created the opportunity for a new appeal, with new, higher levels of contribution.

In mid to late 2001, the Cultural Arts Center began a push for new members that not only asked residents to say Yes to the arts in general, but specifically offered an opportunity to sponsor the *Virgen* mural as a "Treviño member," by donating at least $1,000 each toward the $300,000 cost of the project. The initial appeal for these contributions came from no less than Archbishop Patrick Flores of San Antonio and former San Antonio mayor and U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros. Both men made sizable personal contributions to start the campaign.

For many families, a contribution in the $1,000 range means collecting smaller amounts from several relatives, and even then it can be a level of financial contribution that many have never contemplated before. The total contribution is payable over five years, so it can be as little as $200 a year — still a heavy lift for families struggling along on $35,000 or $50,000 annual incomes. Yet by the middle of 2002, the Center had already reached two-thirds of its $300,000 Treviño goal, with 44 percent of the total coming from individuals. As a result, the full amount seems likely to be raised by the end of 2002.

Treviño members receive a signed, limited-edition fine print, their names will be engraved on a plaque around the mural, and they are automatically enrolled as members of the Center. But they also understand that they will be asked to re-subscribe as members after their Treviño pledge is fulfilled. That pledge, for now, goes solely toward the cost of the mural project, not toward the longer-term purposes of the endowment and capital campaign. The latter will be the topic of a subsequent appeal.

Residents at all income levels are being recruited not just for a gift to the Center, but for their active involvement in helping to attract many more individuals to support the campaign and what it stands for. The scope of this effort touches every

resident of the extended community from laborers and struggling families to small business owners and young professionals, community leaders and board members, on up to family and corporate foundations, the city and state, and national foundations like Ford. To a professional fundraiser, it resembles a classic pyramid, soliciting small donations from a large base, and then progressively larger gifts from fewer and fewer people of greater means. But the organization and structure of the campaign — eight committees with more than 80 volunteers, overwhelmingly composed of rank-and-file members of the community, focusing on a multitude of sub-groups and program goals like civic clubs, businesses, education, and volunteers — would look just as familiar to a seasoned community organizer as to a fundraising consultant.

It is, in fact, in Torralva's words, "a complete, exhaustive outreach to every person who is in any way touched by this heritage — not just outreach for money, although that's obviously essential, but outreach for participation and incorporation into who we are, as a community and as a culture."

Advancing in all directions

Most of the committees are charged with finding contributors — and spotlighting reasons to contribute — from every corner of San Antonio and the central Texas Latino community. Two committees of five to six members each, one on Clubs and Organizations, the other on Education, are designed to bring the campaign to other groups where community members are already organized around common interests. For example, they plan to make a presentation to every civic, charitable, professional, and social organization in the region — from chambers of commerce to YMCAs, schools, and churches — at a pace of five meetings per month per member, adding up to some 25 meetings every month.

The goal of these presentations is to attract close to 1,500 new members giving a total of $80,000 over the course of two years, in amounts ranging from $40 to $100 each — something like 500 people paying $40 each, 700 giving $50, and 250 giving $100, with the hope that those contribution levels could be repeated or increased in future years. Volunteers' presentations will link the mission of the Arts Center to

the missions and interests of the various other groups, re-weaving a bond between the arts and other civic purposes that, to many in Texas, seems to have frayed in recent decades. It's a capital campaign aimed as much at social as financial capital — building a common cause that can outlast the current fundraising drive and create permanent sources of support.

A crucial element of the endowment drive — at least as measured in the total amount of money sought — is the Membership Committee, which hopes to boost individual contributions and memberships eight-fold, through several layers of outreach. On one track, the eight committee members are contacting current members of the Center, particularly those in wealthier neighborhoods, and asking them to host small gatherings of, say, 25 to 30 people at their homes to discuss the future of the Center and encourage guests to contribute to the capital campaign. The range and pace of these gatherings is hugely ambitious: up to two receptions a month over the course of two years. The goal is to raise $7,000 or more at each meeting, with an aggregate goal of $266,000.

The reason for the high goal is that fundraising tends to be much more successful when the appeal comes from people whom the contributor knows personally — and especially so when the contributor hears the appeal both from a personal acquaintance and from someone who can speak firsthand about the organization seeking a donation. "When solicitors meet with people they know," writes Michael Seltzer in his fundraising guide *Securing Your Organization's Future*,* "the response rate is about 50 percent. When solicitors personally ask people they don't know, as in a

* Seltzer, Michael, *Securing Your Organization's Future: A Complete Guide to Fundraising Strategies*, revised and expanded edition, New York: The Foundation Center, 2001, p. 251.

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canvass, the response is about 15 percent. Face-to-face solicitations of either kind yield dramatically higher response rates than when there is no personal contact." Because the message of the Guadalupe Center is essentially personal — a commitment to heritage, culture, family, and education — the personal solicitation of community members is the heart of the campaign. And it carries the single largest dollar target.

On another track, later in the campaign, the committee will conduct two direct-mail solicitations of 12,000 pieces each. Assuming a 2 percent return, with contributions averaging $100, the total yield could be $48,000. While small businesses make up much of the local economy, the Guadalupe Center has never approached this constituency in an organized way. A seven-member Small Business Committee will therefore be charged with increasing business membership to 230 over the next two years, up from just nine in 2001, with the goal of generating $117,500 from gifts ranging between $100 and $1,000 each. Much like the Clubs and Organizations and Education Committees, this Committee will make presentations to chambers of commerce, trade groups for small businesses such as restaurant and entertainment associations, and other membership groups.

The sum total of these community outreach and organizing efforts should raise more than half of the million dollars needed to match the Ford Foundation's challenge grant. To recap, the targets for this half of the campaign are:

New memberships from clubs and organizations:	$80,000
From meetings in private homes:	$266,000
From direct mail	$48,000
From small businesses	$117,500
TOTAL	**$511,500**

Given that the Board of Directors is also raising some $200,000 from among its members and their families and friends, and that staff members will also contribute, the tally from individuals, small gatherings, organizational presentations, small businesses and mass mailings could approach three-quarters of the total needed. The Center's assumption, however, is that some of these efforts will perform better than others, so they have built a deliberate redundancy into the calculations.

To raise the other half of the Ford Foundation matching money, the Center has assembled a Leadership Committee with a team of volunteer writers preparing grant applications addressed to family foundations with an interest in the arts, Latino affairs, Texas — virtually anything that might connect to the work of the Guadalupe Center. (Family foundations qualify as "individual contributors" toward the Ford matching requirement.) Over the course of the campaign, the Leadership Committee also expects to raise another $120,000 from large annual special events, something like a golf tournament.

All these activities and their corresponding goals are aimed primarily at fulfilling the vision of the Ford Foundation's challenge grant: to boost individual contributions to the Arts Center's work, and build channels of individual investment and ownership in that work. Other parts of the campaign, though, aim at similar donor categories — including a significant increase in individual and business memberships, hefty contributions from the city and state, and major contributions from national and regional foundations and corporations. The overall $7 million total, of which the Ford grant and its matching contributions make up $2 million, draws from all these sources and provides for not only an endowment but a new education building, a reliable source of maintenance and repair dollars, more contributors to the Center's operating budget, and more stable finances for the organization overall.

Conclusion: 'All the elements together'

At the center of all these efforts — towering over them, in a sense — is Treviño's 40-foot mural of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, and its message of unity and cultural identity. For María Elena Torralva and the Center's staff and board, the message of the fundraising campaign and that of the mural are essentially the same: "drawing all elements of the community together" for something greater than any one part could achieve on its own. The result is not just an artistic vision, and not just an operating philosophy, but a fundraising strategy as well: reaching every resident, every organization, every sub-group and interest, with a single overarching appeal for culture, heritage, and the arts.

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The campaign is still new, and many of the key activities are just getting under way. It was to have been launched officially in the fall of 2001, but the catastrophe of September 11 put that plan on hold for several months. During that interval, several committees began to organize and to start preliminary, low-key activity. Then in late January, 2002, the Center unveiled its planned mural, its capital campaign, and its vision for the future. Press coverage was enthusiastic, public officials rallied in support, and the campaign was under way.

Yet several months before any of that hoopla, says Torralva, "we had a couple come to our door offering a $1,000 donation."

> They weren't wealthy; you wouldn't have thought they'd be an automatic prospect for that kind of money. But they told me that the woman has cancer and is dying. She said to me, "I was talking to my husband, and we thought that with the little money we have, we could maybe buy a tombstone at the cemetery and no one will ever see it. But then I read about this mural, and I said, 'That's what I want to do with my $1,000.' "
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> We hope that tourists will come, and businesses will sprout here, and many more people will cross that little bridge and visit this community than ever have before. But just as important as all that, to me, are people like that couple, who see this community as a part of their whole life — not just now, but for many generations, even long after they're gone.

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