

An organization with an important mission of lifting the Latino community

The president of NALCAB feels very optimistic about expanding services to Latino community across the country.

PATRICIA GUADALUPE /
WASHINGTON HISPANIC

In a nondescript building just blocks away from the White House and other centers of power is an organization with an incredibly important mission of lifting the Latino community economically.

The National Association for Latino Community Access Builders has been in the nation's capital for seven years, and while its headquarters are in San Antonio, Texas, their spacious and sunny Washington offices are headed by a woman with deep roots in the local community.

Marla Bilonick arrived in the area at age three from Panama and was raised in Montgomery County. After college in Wisconsin, graduate school at Johns Hopkins, and a stint working in New York, Bilonick returned to the DMV to work for an international firm and then on to the Latino Economic Development Center in Columbia Heights, first as a loan officer and then as CEO.

She's been president and CEO of NALCAB since May 2021.

What exactly does NALCAB do? It's a network of more than 200 organizations working in economic development, helping people build assets and achieve economic success – all focused on the Latino community.

"We are where Latinos are, whether in Miami or Los Angeles, but also where there are growing and thriving Latino communities that you may not be aware of, such as in Yakima, Washington state, Alaska, Hawaii.

We have members in every corner, including in Puerto Rico," Bilonick tells Washington Hispanic. "What we do is bolster those organizations, helping them to grow, helping them to be sustainable, we provide financing, community lending organization, we provide grants to our members, we provide

technical assistance. We are the only Latino organization that is focused solely on economic development and asset building. There are plenty of organizations that are focused on broader Latino issues that are very important and pertinent to our community, but our only and very narrow focus is economic mobility, economic development, and asset building for Latinos in the U.S."

That includes building assets such as attaining homeownership, starting and maintaining small businesses, and managing finances.

"Anything that fits under that umbrella that helps people move forward on the spectrum of their financial lives."

Bilonick adds that having a presence in Washington is essential for the work they do on behalf of their member organizations. "We do advocacy here in Washington for our members, meeting with legislators and Biden administration officials, and we also provide a sense of community through convenings and meetings. We have a big national conference that takes place every other year in D.C., so next year it'll be here in D.C. We are doing everything to support those organizations so that they can have a bigger impact in their community," she says. "Our presence in Washington is to be active in pushing forth policies that benefit our members and also advocate against policies that might undermine the work that our members do. It's important that we be here in Washington literally right up the street from the Executive Office Building and from many agencies that we work with. "It's very important that we be here in the middle of all the action."

NALCAB members are either Latino-led or Latino-serving organizations, and the application process to join is pretty straightforward and simple. NALCAB offers a sliding scale of membership dues depending on the budget of the membership organization, and everything is handled by Membership Manager



Marla Bilonick, president of NALCAB says that having a presence in Washington is essential for the work they do on behalf of their member organizations.

FOTO: WASHINGTON HISPANIC

Lexi Castillo at lecastillo@nalcab.org

The majority of the staff – including Bilonick – is bilingual and everything is available in Spanish.

While the group's website – nalcab.org – is just in English for now, Bilonick adds that they hope to have a Spanish version in the near future. NALCAB gets its funding from multiple sources, including the federal government and private groups, including corporations, and is able to lend up to a maximum of \$1.6 million, a figure that Bilonick adds is expected to increase. The short- and long-term outlook for NALCAB looks very good, she tells Washington Hispanic.

"I feel very optimistic about us being able to expand the services that we're offering to achieve a bigger impact in the Latino community across the country."

NALCAB's D.C. offices are centrally located right around the corner from K Street NW, at 910 17th St, NW, Suite 820; Tel: 202.991.9100.

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