

**COMMISSION ON LATINO-AMERICANS
QUARTERLY MEETING**

March 14, 2026

8:30 AM

In-Person
Pour Farm
416 Norris Ave
McCook, NE 69001

Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER

Commission Chair Maria Whitmore called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM

II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Whitmore welcomed everyone in attendance and began introductions. The Commissioners introduced themselves, followed by the office team.

III. ROLL CALL/RECORD ABSENTEES

Present: *Commissioner Leticia Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Evelyn Haro, Commissioner Jaime Suarez, Chair Maria Whitmore, Vice-Chair Marilyn Schacht*

Staff: *Executive Director Maria Arriaga, Office Specialist Dora Lima, Marketing and communications Specialist Ricardo Alcala.*

Absent: *Commissioner Aida Evans, Commissioner Sandra Lopez, Commissioner Roy Rivera*

Motion 1 *to approve roll call and excuse the absences of the Commissioners was made by Governor's Representative Haro. Seconded by Commissioner Rodriguez.*

Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez, Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.

Vote no: none **Motion passed.**

Commissioner Jaime Suarez acted as Secretary in the absence of Commissioner Evans.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Two members of the public took time to thank the Commission for being present in McCook and for traveling out to engage with the community.

V. PUBLIC NOTICE OF MEETING

The Commission on Latino-Americans will host its Quarterly Meeting on Saturday, March 14, 2026. The meeting will take place at Pour Farm, 416 Norris Ave., McCook, NE 69001. We will begin at 8:30 a.m. and adjourn no later than 2 p.m.

The Quarterly Meeting is open to the public and all interested individuals are invited to attend. Time will be allocated for public comments within the first hour of the meeting. We encourage those wishing to speak to call our office ahead of time, in an effort to provide better accommodation.

The agenda for the Quarterly Meeting will be kept current and made available for public inspection at the Commission's office. For further information, please contact us at (402) 471-2791.

Public Notice of this meeting was placed in the Grand Island Independent, Kearney Hub, Lexington Clipper, The North Platte Telegraph, The Lincoln Journal Star, Scottsbluff Star-Herald, Omaha World-Herald, The Columbus Telegram and Hastings Tribune on February 28, 2026; McCook Gazette on February 27, 2026; Mundo Latino Publications on March 3, 2026; and it was e-mailed to the NCLA mail list and posted on Social Media channels.

v. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

*Motion 2 to approve the Agenda was made by Commissioner Rodriguez.
Seconded by Chair Whitmore.*

*Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez,
Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.*

Vote no: none Motion passed.

vi. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

*Motion 3 to approve the Minutes from the December annual meeting was made by
Commissioner Suarez. Seconded by Commissioner Rodriguez.*

*Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez,
Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.*

Vote no: none Motion passed.

viii. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1) Review and approval of updates to the bylaws

The Commissioners reviewed the bylaws and discussed potential revisions to improve the overall function of the Commission. During this discussion, a recommendation was made to establish clear expectations and possible repercussions regarding unexcused absences.

It was proposed that Commissioners be required to attend a minimum of three meetings per year, with only one unexcused absence permitted among missed meetings. Commissioners exceeding this limit would be subject to review by the Executive Board, which would assess the circumstances and determine whether further action is warranted. Any final decision regarding repercussions would involve the full Board.

No formal action was taken at this time. It was agreed that a draft of the proposed changes will be developed and presented to the Board for further consideration, after which it will be submitted to the legal department for review and approval. Commissioners decided to continue refining these recommendations and are expected to bring additional suggestions to the May quarterly meeting.

2) Department of Labor update/Lexington Plant Closure Community Impact

Commissioner Evelyn Haro, serving as the Governor's Representative, provided a report on the response efforts led by the Nebraska Department of Labor following the closure of the Tyson Foods plant. The report outlined actions taken to support affected workers and families in the community.

Following this update, Executive Director María Arriaga presented findings from the Commission's recent visit to Lexington, sharing key insights gathered from community members regarding ongoing challenges and needs.

After both reports, Commissioners engaged in discussion regarding potential next steps. Topics included pursuing meetings with state leadership, including the Governor, and developing a centralized resource hub to be hosted on the Commission's website to better support impacted individuals and families.

IX. NEW BUSINESS 10:20 am

1) Planting Seeds Conference Support Request

Executive Director María Arriaga introduced a support request related to the Planting Seeds Conference. She provided an overview of the conference's purpose and informed Commissioners that both she and Marketing and Communications Specialist Ricardo Alcala will be presenting at the event.

Following a brief review and discussion, the Commissioners moved to approve the request.

***Motion 4** to approve support for the Planting Seeds Conference was made by Chair Whitmore. Seconded by Commissioner Schacht.*

Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez, Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.

*Vote no: none **Motion passed.***

2) Unidos Conference 2026 attendance

Executive Director María Arriaga provided a report on the upcoming UNIDOS conference, which will take place in Austin from July 29–30.

Following discussion of last year's conference and current budget considerations, the Commissioners approved attendance for a total of four individuals. Approved attendees include Executive Director María Arriaga and Marketing and Communications Specialist Ricardo Alcalá, along with two Commissioners who will be selected through an application process at a later date.

Motion 5 to approve attendance for the UNIDOS 2026 Conference was made by Commissioner Suarez. Seconded by Commissioner Schacht.

Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez, Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.

Vote no: none ***Motion passed.***

3) NELYS 2026 update

Executive Director Maria Arriaga provided an update on the 2026 Nebraska Latino Youth Summit, informing the Commissioners that this year's summit will take place on Tuesday, November 10, with a capacity of 500 students. She noted that the later date is due to more adequate scheduling. Additionally, she shared that the Latino Economic Development Council (LEDC) has expressed interest in returning as a planning partner and is willing to sponsor the keynote speaker, including covering associated hotel and travel expenses. The Executive Director concluded her report by announcing that this year's keynote speaker will be Dr. Fernanda Sulantai.

The Commissioners briefly discussed LEDC serving as the fiscal agent for this year's summit before moving to a vote, where the proposal was approved. The Commissioners also selected the theme and graphic identity for NELYS 2026, confirming this year's theme as: *Young Voices, Big Impact*.

Motion 6 to approve LEDC as the fiscal agent for the 2026 NELYS was made by Commissioner Schacht. Seconded by Chair Whitmore.

Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez, Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.

Vote no: none ***Motion passed.***

4) True Potential Scholarship/Sponsorship support

Executive Director María Arriaga provided an overview of the True Potential Scholarship, highlighting that it is one of the few privately funded scholarship opportunities in the state that provides support to undocumented students. She noted that the program has received nearly double the number of applicants this year due to the loss of other similar funding opportunities.

Executive Director Maria Arriaga added that the commission could contribute from the privately donated funds received by the commission for the purpose of providing scholarships. Following a brief discussion of possibilities commissioners voted to approve 3000.00 from private donations received in the Commission's cash fund.

Motion 7 to approve sponsorship of the True Potential Scholarship was made by Commissioner Haro. Seconded by Chair Whitmore.

Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez, Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.

*Vote no: none **Motion passed.***

5) Kristen Diaz Emcee quote

Executive Director Maria Arriaga reported that Kristen Diaz, who served as the Emcee for NELYS 2025, has increased her rates for 2026. The quoted fee is \$3,250, with a returning partner discount rate of \$3,000, plus travel and hotel expenses. An additional option to facilitate a student workshop was offered for \$750.

While acknowledging that Kristen Diaz performed exceptionally well at the previous summit, the Executive Director expressed concern that the increased cost is not feasible within the Commission's current budget.

The Commissioners concurred and agreed to pursue an alternative option for the 2026 Emcee.

6) Supera Design Social Media Support Proposal

Executive Director Maria Arriaga presented a proposal received from Supera Design to support social media marketing efforts for NELYS 2026. She noted that while the proposal includes a range of valuable services, the overall cost exceeds the Commission's current budget.

The Executive Director stated that she plans to meet with Supera Design to refine the scope of services and identify priority items in order to reduce the cost to a more feasible level. She emphasized that investing in marketing support is necessary, as the design and promotional workload is substantial for one individual. She also noted the importance of alleviating the workload of Marketing and Communications Specialist Ricardo Alcala, given the demands of the upcoming year.

7) New Commissioner Roy Rivera

Executive Director Maria Arriaga informed the Commissioners of the recent appointment of Commissioner Roy Rivera. She also noted that there are currently three vacancies on the Commission. The Executive Director encouraged Commissioners to share the opportunity to join the board within their respective networks to assist in recruiting qualified candidates.

X. FINANCIAL REPORTS

The Commissioners took a moment to review the budget reports

- 1) Review of Budget Status Reports for December, January, February
- 2) Review of General Ledger Reports for December, January, February

Motion 8 to approve the budget reports was made by Commissioner Suarez.
Seconded by Commissioner Schacht.

Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez, Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.

*Vote no: none **Motion passed.***

XI. DIRECTOR REPORT

Executive Director Maria Arriaga presented her report to the Commissioners, outlining her ongoing efforts to advance the Commission's mission. The Commissioners expressed their appreciation for her hard work and dedication.

Motion 9 to approve the Directors' report was made by Commissioner Rodriguez.
Seconded by Commissioner Haro.

Vote yes: Commissioner Rodriguez, Governor's Representative Haro, Commissioner Suarez, Chair Whitmore, Vice-Chair Schacht.

*Vote no: none **Motion passed.***

XII. COMMISSIONERS REPORTS

Governor's Representative Evelyn Haro: Reported making two visits to Lexington to assist community members with weekly job searches and unemployment claims, providing direct support to individuals navigating employment challenges.

Additionally, the Governor's Representative shared her involvement with the Semi quincennial Commission, which convenes on a monthly basis.

Commissioner Jaime Suarez: Reported ongoing collaboration with the Mexican Consulate in Omaha in planning a potential art exhibit anticipated for May.

Additionally, the Commissioner shared his work with OneWorld Community Health Centers on initiatives focused on expanding access to mental health resources and support within the community.

Commissioner Leticia Rodriguez: Reported delivering a career presentation at a school in Madison for students for whom English is a second language, providing guidance on career pathways and opportunities.

Vice-Chair Marilyn Schacht: Shared ongoing conversations surrounding the impact of mental health and how the current political climate has been affecting the community of Crete. She also reported that Crete is partnering with Bryan Crete Medical Center to expand access to mental health services for residents, helping address growing community needs.

Chair Maria Whitmore: Reported ongoing efforts to replicate an afterschool program currently operating in Grand Island and expand it to other rural communities, with the goal of increasing access to supportive programming for youth. Additionally, she shared that she has been providing community education on how to interact with law enforcement and navigate the court system, including guidance on legal processes and steps individuals should follow.

xiii. EXECUTIVE SESSION

No executive session was held

xiv. NEXT MEETING

May 2nd, 2026, in Grand Island

xv. ADJOURN 2:00 pm

Meeting adjourned at 1:33 PM

Acting Secretary: Commissioner Jaime Suarez
Transcribed by: Marketing and Communications Specialist Ricardo Alcala