

PROSPERA'S LATINA ENTREPRENEUR FELLOWSHIP & THE POWER OF A DREAM FUND



**ANNUAL REPORT
MAY 2019 -
AUGUST 2020**

THE POWER OF A DREAM PREVAILS IN THE MIDST OF COVID

What a year to pilot our first ever Power of a Dream fellowship! During these 12 months our fellows experienced the excitement of incredible business growth, followed by disappointment and loss as the pandemic hit. However, their resilience and the support of the Fellowship have kept their dreams (and businesses) alive. Above all, their leadership has flourished amidst the challenges, as they have again and again stepped up to put into action their cooperative values. **Read on to find out more about the incredible women in this program!**



*"This Fellowship is the reason why I still have this business
- they inspire me and inspire me to inspire other people.*

I feel strong and I'm not alone."

Anahi Rojas, founder of Professional Eco Cleaning

"COVID, with all its difficulties, brought me enormous lessons on resilience. I have realized that the needs that we have as cooperative immigrants and entrepreneurs in the US can be met, thanks to organizations and programs like Prospera's Fellowship. It has also been important to me to have the motivation, exchange of ideas, and accompaniment of the rest of the entrepreneurs in Prospera's programs, including Crece and my business partner."

Ana Castaña, founder of Luna y Sol Bay Area Nanny Collective

"The fellowship gives me a lot of answers - when I don't have a clear vision, they help me plan out what to execute, the checklist, and just to make sure that I continue on my path and on my dreams. Especially, since we've lost business [due to COVID], how we can reinvent ourselves to be selling these hard times. It's been very very helpful to have them during Covid."

Nancy Rosales, founder Pepitas Paletas

ABOUT THE POWER OF A DREAM INITIATIVE

Prospera envisions a vibrant ecosystem of Latina-owned businesses cooperating to transform communities and local economies and building prosperity for the benefit of all.

To accelerate the incubation of Latina-led cooperatives, in May 2019 Prospera launched its first paid fellowship called The Power of a Dream Incubation Program with 3 Latina immigrant entrepreneurs.

After a competitive process, requiring a business plan, letters of recommendation as well as a pitch to staff and the entire cohort of applicants, only three out of seven high-quality applications were selected for this two-year program. The finalists were **Anahi Rojas, Founder of Professional Eco-cleaning, a green house cleaning cooperative in the East Bay, Nancy Rosales, Founder of Pepitos Paletas, which caters organic and authentic paletas (Mexican popsicles) in the Bay Area, and Ana Castaño, founder of Luna y Sol Nanny Collective, an online childcare platform that will connect families with nannies in the Bay Area.**

This program invests in the leadership of select entrepreneurs enrolled in the organization's business incubation program called Crece (which means Grow). It targets founding members of cooperative projects that are poised to grow and provide business ownership opportunities for other women. In addition to receiving the ongoing training and technical assistance that is part of the Crece program, fellows access increased and tailored industry-specific support, leadership coaching, and a seed grant that makes it possible for them to dedicate a minimum of 20 hours per week to grow the business.

This report shares the results of the first year of this brand new initiative with some of the highlights, testimonials, and lessons learned, as well as how through this program Prospera has been able to support our fellows to navigate the impacts of the pandemic.

Thank you to Latino Community Foundation, the Akonadi Foundation, CCHD, the Chrysalis Fund and Y&H Soda Foundation for believing in this initiative and contributing to creating just local economies that lift up immigrants and communities of color.



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Prior to the COVID-19 threat, many Latina immigrant women already faced roadblocks to success, from language barriers to anti-immigrant policies and attacks, making transition to a new home isolating and disempowering. Most of Prospera's entrepreneurs are part of the 1 million Latina-headed households that live in poverty in the U.S., often working two or more unstable jobs to make ends meet.

These existing inequities are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. When the shelter in place started, we conducted a survey of 58 women enrolled in our programs to assess needs in real time. We found that 36% had no savings, and less than a third of the women had savings that would cover more than two months' expenses. Nearly half had no way to work from home, due to lack of opportunity or technology barriers. Of the newest cohort of entrepreneurs that took our Explora Online course this spring, 69% experienced decreased income due to COVID-19. As a result, approximately 96% of participants classified as low to extremely low income during the first three months of the pandemic.

Our fellows were also impacted by the pandemic. For the two fellows with established businesses, sales came to a halt. **Anahi, founder of Professional Eco Cleaning, had just taken out a loan for \$50,000 to expand operations capacity and had hired three new employees, for a total of five full-time and one part-time staff. In February, she signed a lease for an office space and launched a new Operations Manager position. In March, all cleaning work was cancelled. Except for a few loyal clients who continued to send payments, income abruptly dropped.** Anahi wondered how she would pay her loan, but what really weighed on her heart was how to pay her staff.

Nancy had doubled her paletas (Mexican popsicles) sales during the first six months of the fellowship, largely due to orders from local technology companies. During peak season she employed five part-time workers as well as three full-time employees, who would have the possibility of converting to worker-ownership after two years. In November she obtained a Kiva loan to invest in a more environmentally sustainable packaging system and expand sales capacity. **As was the case with Anahi, with the arrival of COVID her sales dropped. All orders for paletas were cancelled, with no foreseeable new dates - meaning, no foreseeable income.**

Ana's business was still in the pre-launch stage when COVID hit. She was immersed in the recruitment process for co-owners and developing her brand. Her main income source was her job as a nanny - which she lost due to the pandemic. Our three fellows found themselves with employees and families to care for, loans to pay, and no income - except for their monthly \$1,500 stipend from the Fellowship.

RESPONDING TO COVID

We are pleased to report that our three fellows have maintained their businesses during these months, thanks in large part to their participation in the Fellowship program. In addition, they have further advanced their cooperative values and flexed their leadership to support other women. It hasn't been easy, and they aren't out of the woods yet. In response to the unprecedented challenges they are facing, **Prospera has extended the stipend period of the Fellowship by six months in order to continue to support the fellows in a more intensive way through December 2020.**



Anahi was able to obtain a forgivable payroll loan through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and a \$5,000 grant from Small Business Administration. She also obtained a \$15,000 Kiva loan as part of Kiva's first round of emergency loans in response to the pandemic and \$1,000 from Prospera's Latina Entrepreneur Resiliency Fund. While she scrambled to secure funds, Anahi continued to pay her six employees for the first two months of the pandemic, despite the fact that they could not work. Unfortunately, when the PPP funds only covered half of her staff, and she ultimately had to let go of three employees.

Anahi has adapted her business by making changes to procedures in order to keep staff and clients safe while promoting disinfection services for homes and offices. She also has begun to sell environmentally friendly cleaning products through the business's website.



Nancy worked side by side with her Prospera coach to make a complete assessment of her cash flow and brainstorm ways to keep the business moving forward. Nancy applied to the Paycheck Protection Program through Wells Fargo but, like so many other women- and POC-owned businesses, she was denied funding. Nancy did obtain a \$10,000 relief grant from Verizon to help her cover the gaps as well as \$1000 from the Resiliency Fund. She had to reduce her staff and currently runs the business on a small scale, with three part-time contractors helping with sales and marketing. **Nancy says that although she will not make any profit this year, she hopes at the least to keep her presence in the market and prepare for growth next year.**



Ana did not let financial worries stop her from pursuing her business! She applied for emergency assistance from the Latina Entrepreneur Resiliency Fund to help her manage her income gap caused by the pandemic, and soon found a new job. She also obtained a \$3,000 loan from Kiva in May to cover start-up costs for her business. In addition to integrating COVID safety protocols into their services, **Ana and her business partner Flor are evaluating options for adapting services to the current situation, including working with pods of children and focusing on long-term relationships with families rather than temporary childcare.**



Another example of our fellows' adaptation is the Unidas initiative started by Anahi and Nancy, along with another Prospera entrepreneur. **Unidas is a collective of local businesses in the Bay Area committed to building strong networks while celebrating each other's strengths.** "We began this collaboration to be proactive in approaching the sales problems that COVID has thrust upon business owners," says Nancy. The group is focused on four main values in its network of support: social entrepreneurship, local business, Latina resilience, and cooperation.

EXTRAORDINARY LEADERSHIP IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

The fellows also grew immensely as leaders during their Fellowship: speaking on panels and in the media, conducting a COVID needs assessment among the Prospera community, and playing a key role on the governance committee of our Latina Entrepreneur Resiliency Fund. In total, they presented at 20 speaking engagements, participated as leaders and facilitated workshops inside Prospera and externally, and engaged their activism in more than 10 civic and political events during their time as fellows.

Highlights include:

- **Fellows conducted interviews** with Prospera participants as part of a holistic needs assessment process at the onset of the pandemic, in which 58 members of our community were assessed. (see results of the assessment [here](#))
- When Prospera launched the Latina Entrepreneur Resiliency Fund to meet emergency financial needs in our community, **the fellows joined the Fund governance committee**, which establishes the procedures for fund distribution and replenishment.
- **Anahi** gave an emotive and inspiring interview as part of a panel of Latina entrepreneurs during the first virtual forum **Levantando Nuestras Voces** / Lifting our Voices in April. In this forum, stories of COVID-induced challenges and resilience were shared with community organizations and funders.
- **Ana** was one of four advanced entrepreneur trainers who **facilitated our first online Explora course** this spring. Her bright energy and cooperative expertise added to the magic of the course.
- **Anahi and Ana** have taken **leadership roles in the newly formed Levantando Nuestras Voces** / Lifting our Voices coalition. Anahi participates in the advocacy committee, and Ana in the community-building committee.
- **Ana and Nancy continue to serve on Prospera's Board of Directors**, enriching it with their perspectives, wisdom, and experience.
- **The fellows made pitches at The Real People's Fund**, a new collaborative to finance a just economy in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, bringing visibility to their projects and making new connections.
- **KBBF - Voces de Mujeres Radio** by Amalia Contardi, October 19th. Radio Live Interview from the Summit with Ana and Anahi.
- **Visión Hispana Newspaper** by Elena Miramar, October 27th. Interview about the Summit and their businesses with Nancy Rosales.
- **Radio Bilingüe Special Program** from the Summit by Chelis Lopez, December 5th. Interview with Anahi Rojas.

HOW HAS YOUR LEADERSHIP GROWN AS A RESULT OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE FELLOWSHIP?

Anahi: "Enormously! I have learned to supervise others, evaluate, speak in public, and plan meetings."

Ana: "As part of the pre-established participation agreement, I have been presented with opportunities and obligations, including serving as an ambassador for Prospera and its programs. In this process I have received training in public speaking, writing out my thoughts, structuring my ideas, Popular Education, the situation facing my community, and effective communication."

Nancy: "It has taught me to be more patient, calm, and organized."

THE FELLOWSHIP'S IMPACT ON OTHER WOMEN

One of the objectives of the Fellowship is to positively impact not only the fellows and their businesses, but also other women involved in the businesses, including staff and co-owners. During the first six months of the Fellowship, five full time jobs, six part time jobs, and three seasonal full-time positions were provided through the businesses. Although that number was reduced due to COVID, we are confident that these women will not only continue to grow their businesses but will do so in ways that create meaningful and sustaining opportunities for others.

Anahi's dedication to paying her employees during the first two months of the pandemic is an example of the values that guide our fellows. In addition, she helped her employees raise emergency funds for their families and connected them to resources such as food banks and grants. Both Ana's co-owner Flor and Anahi's six employees were able to benefit from the Latina Entrepreneur Resiliency Fund, which distributed a total of \$900-\$1000 per woman.

Another way that our fellows have impacted other women is through education and skill building. Ana says, "my business partner has had the opportunity to be trained with me thanks to the indirect support that I receive and immediately pass on to her." This training has included organization techniques and communication, which Ana and Flor have applied not only to their cooperative but personally, in their communities, and in their families.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIRST YEAR OF THE FELLOWSHIP

During the first six months of the Fellowship program we saw that, given the proper tools and time, our fellows could achieve tremendous growth in their businesses and as leaders. If we were amazed by their power then, during these last six months we have been humbled and awed by their resilience and their commitment to cooperative values. We at Prospera have also witnessed the disproportionately devastating impacts that this pandemic has on immigrants and communities of color and have committed ourselves to working more closely with other organizations to advocate for better policies and access to resources for Latina entrepreneurs.

Here is what the fellows have learned, in their words:

Anahi: *"[I learned about] how to cope with the barriers of the pandemic and use them to my advantage."*

Ana: *"I am more convinced than ever to base our business on cooperative principles."*

Nancy: *"I have come to believe that my ideas are valuable and that other people believe in my business. I have seen that people want to invest."*

"Four years ago, when Maria and I contemplated the idea of creating a program to recognize and develop the leadership of our most advanced participants in our program, we didn't imagine the tremendous impact that this would bring to EVERYONE! We have learned that by investing time in women's leadership, the women, their economies and their commitment to the community grow.

We cannot speak of equity and solidarity economies if we don't recognize the obstacles that women face to lift up their voices in a patriarchal world dominated by capital."

Claudia Arroyo, Executive Director of Prospera

WHAT ELSE HAVE WE BEEN UP TO

Prospera has been very busy in 2020! Here are some highlights from our programs and initiatives:

- **Community Needs Assessment.** At the onset of the pandemic, Prospera's staff and fellows carried out a listening campaign and survey to understand the needs of the women in our community, as well as how they wanted to help each other. For a snapshot of the survey results, click [here](#).
- **Levantando Nuestras Voces/Raising our Voices Coalition**. As we learned more about our community's challenges, we recognized the need for other organizations and policy makers to hear from Latina entrepreneurs directly. In partnership with Latina Community Foundation, we put on an online forum to lift up the voices of Latina entrepreneurs. From what we learned from participants, we built a coalition of organizations to advocate for the needs of Latina entrepreneurs, curate and disseminate resources, and build community.
- **Latina Entrepreneur Resiliency Fund**. Prospera launched this fund to meet the emergency economic needs of our program participants due to COVID-19. The fund is governed by a committee consisting of our past and present fellows and executive director. Each round of fund disbursement has benefitted 32 women to cover their basic needs. We are currently planning for our third disbursement of funds.
- **Explora On-line.** Prospera adapted Explora, our 30-hour signature course on the fundamentals of cooperative business ownership, to online format in response to the pandemic. Our spring cohort included 25 entrepreneurs from four states! In order to enable participation despite gaps in experience with technology, we offered an orientation to using the online platform. Our trainers in training, including fellow Ana Castaño, co-facilitated the sessions and managed to transmit the warmth, interactivity, and magic that is signature of Explora through the screen. [Check out](#) the blog post about this edition.
- **Technological Support.** We learned early on that lack of access to technology was a major obstacle facing our community, and an increasingly critical one as the pandemic developed. Thanks to support from the Latino Community Foundation's Latinos in Tech giving circle, we were able to assess needs and distribute \$11,000 worth of software and hardware to Latina entrepreneurs struggling to adapt their businesses.



NEXT STEPS FOR THE POWER OF A DREAM

Given the new situation with COVID, at Prospera we have decided to extend the stipend period for these three entrepreneurs through the end of 2020 in order to continue to support them in the stabilization of their businesses. As the Fellowship is a 2 year program, this round of fellows will continue to receive coaching, technical assistance, and leadership development opportunities through December 2021.

In parallel, we are currently in the selection process for the next three fellows, who will enter the first year of their Fellowship cycle in October 2020. The Fellowship is open to women entrepreneurs who have graduated from Explora, participate actively in Crece, and have a business plan that has potential to impact and bring prosperity to other women.



Fellows will receive:

- intensive coaching for up to 2 years to support the launch and/or growth of their cooperative business.
- monthly stipend to cover business development time (approximately 20 hours per week) of the entrepreneur during one year
- access to technical support (legal, business development, industry-specific, marketing, etc) to complete a feasibility study and/or business plan
- access to a \$20,000 loan (through KIVA and Prospera) to invest in the business once it has been deemed viable.

Stay tuned for more updates. If you would like to learn more about how to invest in the Power of a Dream Incubation Fund please contact:

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