



InET Consortium

“Plazas Comunitarias”

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Anyone who has visited Mexico is familiar with the concept of “Plazas” or “Placitas” which loosely translates into “town square.” These are places where people gather to meet, socialize, trade, and to have their political and religious instruction. Plazas are located in the heart of the town. The plaza will generally have a church or cathedral on one side with its bell towers to call the community to mass or to special events, and a government building or “palacio municipal” on the other side. The rest of its perimeter is dotted with businesses ranging from pharmacies to trade schools, restaurants, coffee shops, and juice parlors. Like spokes in a wheel, all walkways lead to the centerpiece of the plaza which is a raised kiosk often used as a stage to showcase artists, performers, musicians, and political leaders. The plazas are truly the towns’ “community centers.”

The government of Mexico, in collaboration with local educational institutions, seeks to support and promote the individual and collective development of Mexicans living abroad in the United States, Canada, and the rest of the world, through flexible education programs. The concept of a plaza is used to provide a gathering place for individuals, families, and the communities, to meet, socialize, learn, and obtain better opportunities. They call this outreach, Plazas Comunitarias.

Through the Plazas Comunitarias program, e-Mexico in the United States has been successful in creating a community and technological structure to support Mexican nationals. The success of Plazas Comunitarias goes beyond the educational expectations among Spanish speakers in the United States. This project incorporates information and communication technologies geared toward improving education, employment, and quality of life.

In the Plazas Comunitarias, youth and adults have access to training in preparation for work and opportunities for higher education. The most common educational programs offered are: literacy, elementary, secondary (self-paced and online), and high school education as well as English and Spanish classes. Most Plazas Comunitarias also offer courses to prepare students for the General Education Development (GED) exam required by US educational institutions as well as job training for Spanish-speaking youth and adults.

Background

The National Council of Education for Life and Work (CONEVyT) in collaboration with partner institutions such as the National Institute for the Education of Adults (INEA), the Colegio de Bachilleres (COLBACH), the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), Training Centers for Industrial Workers (CECATI), the Directorate-General of Educational Television (DGTVE), and the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs (SRE), through the Institute for Mexicans abroad (IME), have joined forces to promote a variety of options for education and training through the Plazas Comunitarias e-Mexico in the United States.

One of the highlights of this program is the scheduling flexibility to offer courses and classes that will meet the needs of the students regardless of geographic location. Plazas Comunitarias are not exclusive to the educational programs offered on their online menus but offer the flexibility for schools, institutions, and groups involved in the Plazas Comunitarias to provide additional programs and resources deemed necessary. They complement the educational requirements of their communities. In addition, this program is free of charge to those 15 years of age and older regardless of their country of origin. Each Plaza Comunitaria selects the services it will provide. It can offer a specific service and, as the need arises, augment it by adding and integrating other services and offerings based on the needs of the community and the resources available.

Once a group, organization, or institution decides to establish or “install” a Plaza Comunitaria, it is necessary to sign an agreement called the “Work Program.” This is a legal understanding to promote education for adults as stipulated through the Memorandum of Understanding Mexico-United States (1990), the Decree of Creation and Organic Statute of INEA, and the coordination agreement between INEA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

An Operations Manual explains in detail the responsibilities and obligations of the participants and contains information about the makeup and components of a Plaza. The manual also contains general information about a Plaza, its characteristics, objectives, and the services it offers. The purpose is to provide individuals with the necessary knowledge and information to share with potential partners for establishing a Plaza Comunitaria. The resources and ideas help individuals outline the benefits to the community and to the potential partners/sponsors involved.

Among the different programs the Government of Mexico has developed to support their communities abroad, the Plazas Comunitarias program has experienced the greatest success, interest, and commitment from its nationals living outside of Mexico. The Plazas Comunitarias continue to be a viable vehicle to reaffirm that education is the primary goal in achieving better opportunities.

For more information see:

www.mexterior.sep.gob.mx
