

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

ILLINOIS

EST. 2022

HISPANIC NETWORK

CRECIENDO PARA SERVIR

HALF-DAY CONFERENCE | 10/09/2026

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY - NAPERVILLE CAMPUS

1120 DIEHL RD., NAPERVILLE, IL 60563



WELCOME MESSAGE

Dear Conference Attendees:

It is my privilege to welcome you to the Illinois Local Government Hispanic Network (ILGHN) 2nd Annual Half-Day Conference: Creciendo Para Servir! The conference will be a space to learn from our colleagues who have been there, invest in the next generation of local government professionals, and remind ourselves why we do this work in the first place: When we grow, we serve better.

Many of us chose a career in local government because we want to make a difference and find that public service can be challenging - doing it when you are often the first, or one of a few, in the room comes with its own particular difficulties. Navigating career transitions, leading without authority, and finding a footing in institutions is not easy and often takes place without a roadmap.

ILGHN believes in the communities we serve, and this conference is about investing in each other so we can keep doing it well. Whether you're just starting out or leading your department, there's a seat at this table for you!

We are honored to host you for a robust and collaborative experience with professionals dedicated to advancing leadership, fostering representation, and promoting culturally informed community engagement.

On behalf of the ILGHN Board, thank you for your continued support and for being part of our growing network. Your participation is invaluable and is the foundation for ILGHN. Let's have meaningful and impactful conversations, connections, and inspiring moments at the conference!

Sincerely,

Consuelo Arguilles

Consuelo Arguilles
CHAIR
Illinois Local Government Hispanic Network



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CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

8:00– 9:00 AM | Café y Platicas (Registration and Networking)
Location: Atrium

9:00 - 9:15 AM | Bienvenidas & Opening Remarks: ILGHN Chair, Consuelo Arguilles
Location: Room 111

9:15 - 10:15 AM | Keynote Address: Viviana Ramirez, City of West Chicago

- *Creciendo Para Servir: Finding Your Voice in Public Service*

Location: Room 111

10:15 – 10:30 AM | Break

10:30 – 11:30 AM | Breakout Sessions

- Breakout A: *Growing through Change: Preparing Your People for ERP Success* ***Location: Room 119***
- Breakout B: *Other Duties as Assigned: Navigating Career Transitions and Diversifying Your Skillset* ***Location: Room 121***
- Breakout C: *Student Coaching Roundtables* ***Location: Room 111***

11:30 | Closing Remarks: Leadership Can be Lonely, the Journey Doesn't Have to Be, LGHN Board Member, Daniel Ortiz, ICMA-CM

Acknowledgements, ILGHN Chair, Consuelo Arguilles
Location: Room 111

Post Conference Social
Uncle Julio's Naperville
1831 Abriter Ct,
Naperville, IL 60563

MEET THE SPEAKERS

Keynote



Viviana Ramirez

Viviana Ramirez serves as the City Administrator for the City of West Chicago, bringing more than two decades of experience in law, public service, organizational leadership, and community engagement. A licensed attorney in Illinois and Utah, she has held leadership roles in municipal government and the legal profession, including serving as Chief of the Conviction Integrity Unit in the Kane County State's Attorney's Office, Aurora's Chief Community Services Office, and as Aurora's Chief Community Services Officer and Director of Community Services.

Viviana is also an adjunct professor at Aurora University, where she teaches courses in advocacy and mock trial. Bilingual in English and Spanish and proudly Colombian American, she has built her career at the intersection of law, local government, leadership, and community. Her professional journey reflects a commitment to thoughtful leadership, continuous growth and the belief that strong local government begins with understanding and serving the people who call a community home.



Justin Gutierrez

Justin Gutierrez is a Senior Consultant with the Government Finance Officers Association's (GFOA) Research and Consulting Center where he supports governments' efforts to enhance their business processes, policies, and enterprise resource planning systems.

Prior to joining GFOA, he worked for the City of Chicago, serving City residents for over a decade. Most recently, Justin worked for the City of Chicago's Office of Inspector General as a Performance Analyst where he conducted performance audits of City operations and programs. In this capacity, Justin's work included evaluating the City's Housing First model of assistance to unhoused people living in encampments, assessing recycling enforcement for commercial and high-density residential buildings, and conducting a data advisory detailing a patchwork of data quality issues across City departments. Justin earned his BA in Sociology from North Central College and his MA in Urban Planning & Policy from the University of Illinois Chicago.

Dr. Natalia Nieves, PhD, LCPC



Dr. Natalia Nieves, Ph.D., LCPC, was born and raised in Puerto Rico and has proudly served the City of Rolling Meadows for the past 13 years. She began her career as the City's first Police Social Services professional, creating a pioneering role that embedded trauma-informed services within law enforcement and strengthened support for victims and vulnerable residents. Under Director Nieves's leadership, in 2024 that single position evolved into a comprehensive Department of Human Services with four service divisions, a Community Resource Center, and the Hope Fund, the City's 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides emergency assistance to crime victims and families in crisis.

A licensed clinician and community leader with nearly two decades of experience, Dr. Nieves is passionate about building innovative, collaborative systems that improve access to mental health care, social services, and community resources. She currently co-chairs the Cook County Regional Behavioral Health Collaborative and the North Suburban Alliance Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, advancing regional partnerships that strengthen communities across northern Illinois.



Alex Arteaga

Alex Arteaga has proudly served the Village of Willowbrook since May 2022, assuming his current position as Assistant Village Administrator in April 2024. Following a career transition from secondary education to local government in 2018, he had previously served the Village of Wilmette before joining his current Willowbrook team. Throughout his local government career, Alex has prioritized collaboration, innovation, and professional development. While helping lead the growth of his Village, he remains an active member on boards and committees for ILCMA, IRMA, GIN, MGP, and DMMC.

As a dedicated public sector employee, Alex is committed to fostering positive relationships and achieving shared goals between public agencies and the communities they serve.

Adela Boesel



Adela Boesel serves as the economic development specialist for the Village of Barrington, working at the intersection of business, real estate, and local government to connect companies, property owners, and decision-makers with opportunities that drive investment and economic growth.

Adela brings more than 25 years of private-sector experience spanning commercial, industrial, and residential property management, leasing, and marketing, as well as experience as a small business owner. Her transition into economic development brings a business-minded perspective to public service, with an understanding of both the opportunities and challenges businesses and property owners face when making investment and growth decisions.

Adela is actively engaged in the economic development and commercial real estate community and regularly participates in industry panels, webinars, and professional events that strengthen public-private sector collaboration. She is passionate about building meaningful relationships, creating connections, and turning conversations into opportunities for businesses and communities. Adela is a DePaul University graduate and a recipient of the 2025 Wintrust Bank Community Leadership Award.



Gabriel Lopez

Gabriel Lopez is a Management Analyst in the Village of Downers Grove's Public Works Department, where he supports initiatives that strengthen organizational effectiveness and service delivery. He holds a Master of Public Administration from Northern Illinois University and a Bachelor's degree from Northwestern University. Prior to local government, Gabriel worked for U.S. Congressman and later managed consulting projects across the Midwest and East Coast. He is actively involved in the public administration profession, serving on the ICMA Task Force that updated the Guide to Breaking into Local Government and as Secretary of ASPA's LGBT Advocacy Alliance Section. Gabriel is committed to advancing inclusive leadership, public trust, and the future of local government.

José Acosta



José Acosta is a Planning Coordinator with the Village of Skokie, where he has had the opportunity to build his career in local government and work closely with residents, businesses, and community members. José enjoys the variety that comes with working in municipal government and being part of the process that helps shape the community he serves. José is excited to be involved with the Illinois Local Government Hispanic Network because he believes in creating a space where Hispanic and Latino professionals in local government can connect, support one another, and grow together. He hopes to help build a strong local network with other Latinos in local government while creating opportunities for others who are interested in public service.



Denis Sanchez

Denis Sanchez serves as the Finance & HR Coordinator for the Village of Berkeley. Prior to working in Berkeley, Denis only had private sector experience, mainly in the medical field. She started in Berkeley as a part-time Accounts Payable (AP) Specialist. A few months later, she transitioned to the role of Full-Time Office/AP Specialist. After serving in this role for about a year, she was promoted to the Finance & HR Coordinator position. Denis knew she was not fully prepared for the role and was aware that it would require a lot of learning. Denis credits Village Administrator, Rudy Espiritu, for introducing her to ILGHN and for believing in her and allowing her to grow and better herself personally and professionally.

Daniel Ortiz Hernandez, ICMA-CM



Daniel serves as City Manager for the City of Beloit, Wisconsin, bringing extensive experience in local government leadership and public administration. Throughout his career, Daniel has served communities across the country, including in Wisconsin, Texas, Nebraska, California, and Iowa. His experience spans organizational leadership, strategic planning, economic and community development, budgeting and financial management, infrastructure and capital planning, intergovernmental relations, and community engagement. Prior to joining Beloit, Daniel served as Assistant City Manager for the City of Ennis, Texas.

Daniel is an ICMA Credentialed Manager and is actively involved in advancing the local government profession at the state and national levels. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Local Government Hispanic Network (LGHN), including as Vice President for Professional Development. He is passionate about developing emerging leaders, strengthening inclusive and high-performing organizations, and creating opportunities for professional growth within local government.

Throughout his career, Daniel has remained committed to professional local government management, collaborative leadership, continuous learning, and public service that strengthens municipal organizations and the communities they serve.

The Sessions



Keynote Session

Viviana Ramirez, Creciendo Para Servir: Finding Your Voice in Public Service

Room 111

What does it mean to grow in public service while staying connected to the people and purpose that brought us here?

Drawing on her journey through law, community engagement, and local government leadership, Viviana Ramirez will reflect on finding your voice, opening doors for others, and navigating the moments when the path forward isn't clear. This keynote will invite participants to consider the strengths they bring to their work and ways they help others grow as they grow.

Learning Objectives

- Identify personal strenghts
- Identify opportunities for promoting growth in others
- Personal journey and challenges

ICMA CM Credits: Personal Resiliency and Development



Justin Gutierrez

Breakout Session 1:

Growing Through Change: Preparing Your People for ERP Success

Location: Room 119

Municipal ERP replacement projects are massive undertakings that require support from all levels of government staff. While these projects are often viewed as technology investments, their success ultimately depends on people—their willingness and ability to lead, participate in, and navigate significant operational and cultural change. The months leading up to implementation provide a critical opportunity to prepare both the organization and its people by establishing clear goals and roles, engaging staff across departments, documenting business processes, preparing for data conversion, and creating accountability for results. For professionals who are often navigating change, leading without formal authority, or helping institutions better reflect and serve their communities, an ERP project can present both significant challenges and meaningful opportunities for growth. This session will provide practical strategies for preparing staff and organizations for ERP implementation while exploring how effective leadership, collaboration, and preparation can help local governments grow—and ultimately serve their communities better.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify practical strategies for preparing staff and organizations for ERP implementation
- Explore how effective leadership and collaboration can help local governments grow and better serve their communities
- Understand how ERP implementation requires organizational culture and operational changes

ICMA CM Credits: Staff Effectiveness, Strategic Leadership, Strategic Planning, Service Delivery, Technological Literacy, APA-CM Credits

Breakout Session 2:

Other Duties as Assigned: Navigating Career Transitions and Diversifying Your Skillset

Location: Room 121



Alex Arteaga



Dr. Natalia Nieves



Adela Boesel

Most of us didn't follow a straight path to get where we are. This session is about the unofficial curriculum of a public service career: the lateral moves, the unexpected pivots, and the moments where you had to build the skills before receiving guidance.

Other Duties as Assigned: Navigating Career Transitions and Diversifying Your Skills features senior level panelists Alex Arteaga, Natalia Nieves, and Adela Boesel, who will share their non-traditional pathways into local government, the challenges they faced during those transitional periods, the ways they have grown as individuals and professionals, and will share tools and skills for jumping into the unknown.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify tools and skills for navigating career transitions
- Articulate the value of a non-traditional career path
- Recognize the role of personal growth and resilience in pursuing professional aspirations

ICMA CM Credits: Personal Resiliency and Development, Strategic Leadership, APA-CM Credits

Breakout Session 3:

Student Coaching Roundtables

Location: Room 111



Gabriel Lopez



Jose Acosta



Denis Sanchez

This informal session connects students and recent graduates with early- and mid-career professionals across departments to engage in dialogue about what the work actually looks like and how to find your place in it.

Students will have the opportunity to engage with professionals in Public Works, Community Development, Finance, and Human Resources. The panelists will share their experiences in transitioning from a student to an early to mid-career professional, the early lessons and mistakes, the wins, how to navigate the first job search, and the gaps between what you learn in the classroom and what you experience on the job.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- How to navigate firsts: Challenges, jobs, and mistakes
- How to address gaps between the classroom and the job
- How to navigate transitioning from a student or intern to an early career professional
- Tools for confidence building as an early career professional

Closing Remarks:

Leadership Can be Lonely, the Journey Doesn't Have to Be

Location: Room 119



Daniel Ortiz Hernandez

Daniel will reflect on his journey through local government and the experiences, relationships, mentors, and challenges that have shaped his growth as a public servant and leader through a career that has spanned multiple states. His remarks will explore the importance of building meaningful professional relationships, investing in one another, and creating opportunities for those who follow. He will conclude by reflecting on the role ILGHN and LGHN can play in creating a community of support, connection, mentorship, and belonging.

Join ILGHN

Benefits of Joining

Benefits of joining include, but are not limited to:

- **Professional Development** - Members can access resources, trainings, and educational programs
- **Networking and Community Engagment** - Members connect and serve diverse communities
- **Mentorship** - Members have access to the national LGHN 'Madrinas y Padrinos' mentorship program
- **Professional Recognition** - ILGHN provides opportunities for members to be recognized for their contributions
- **Personal Growth** - ILGHN can contribute to personal growth and a sense of belonging

Individuals employed in local government, or in affiliated institutions are eligible to become members. ILGHN offers individual, regional, and student membership options. To learn more about the membership options, or to become a member, please vist LGHN.org or contact us at illinois@lghn.org.

Membership terms begin January 1.



AMIGOS DE ILGHN

This conference was made possible by our generous Sponsors and Partners! Thank you for being part of our event and journey!

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