

Ernesto Morales of North Star Alliances Calls for a Rethink on Community Engagement

Ernesto Morales, based in Los Angeles, urges public and private leaders to start with listening—not messaging—in building trust.

Los Angeles, California May 3, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - Ernesto Morales, CEO of North Star Alliances, is raising urgent awareness around the growing disconnect between institutions and the communities they aim to serve. Citing declining public trust and years of experience leading over 1,100 community engagement projects, Morales is calling on leaders across sectors to prioritize listening before launching.

“The number one mistake I see is people talking before they’ve earned the right to be heard,” said Morales. “True engagement isn’t about campaigns—it’s about conversations.”

A 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer study showed that only **40% of Americans trust major institutions** to act in the public’s interest. Morales believes the solution lies in simple but often overlooked actions: showing up, asking better questions, and giving communities a real seat at the table.

Listening Is the New Strategy

Morales founded **North Star Alliances** in 2012 to support clients—from Google and The White House to LA Metro and local nonprofits—in building real relationships with the public. Over time, he noticed a pattern: many organizations confuse outreach with engagement.

“We’ve seen agencies spend millions on polished messaging that no one trusts,” he said. “People don’t want to be spoken to. They want to be respected.”

He recalls pausing a campaign at Rose Hills Memorial Park early in his career when he realized it didn’t reflect the values of local families.

“We didn’t understand how different communities grieve,” he said. “So we stopped, asked, and changed the strategy. That made all the difference.”

Why It Matters Now

With civic participation declining, Morales warns that ignoring community input isn’t just risky—it’s unsustainable.

According to Pew Research, only 25% of Americans feel they have real influence over local decisions. The result is frustration, mistrust, and disengagement.

“If we want people to show up, we have to show up first,” Morales said. “And not just with a plan—but with an open mind.”

What You Can Do on Your Own

Morales believes that anyone—from city staffers to corporate managers—can help close the gap by changing how they engage. His recommendations:

- **Ask first.** Before launching anything, ask, “What do you need most right now?”
- **Simplify your language.** Speak like a neighbor, not a press release.
- **Partner with local voices.** Work with barbers, faith leaders, or educators—people who are already trusted.
- **Follow up.** If someone gives feedback, tell them what changed because of it.

“You don’t need a million-dollar budget to build trust,” he said. “You just need to care enough to listen.”

About Ernesto Morales and North Star Alliances

Ernesto Morales is the founder and CEO of **North Star Alliances**, a Los Angeles-based firm that designs community engagement strategies for public, private, and nonprofit clients. He has led over 1,100 projects across industries and serves as a State Commissioner for the California Employment Training Panel. He is also a board member of the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation. Morales holds an MBA from Pepperdine University and has built a career around public trust, workforce equity, and inclusive strategy.

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