



## Anai Ibarra-Lopez (1964-Present)

Associate State Director – Communications

**AARP**

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*“We play witness to injustices in our own communities. No one can tell our stories for us.”  
Anai Ibarra-Lopez, 2005.*

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### Overview

Anai Ibarra is a bilingual/bicultural Public Relations professional with over 14 years of experience in the areas of Social Marketing, Advertising, Public Affairs, and Media Relations, offers knowledge and understanding of the Latino community in the U.S. and Latin America. A native of Guatemala, Anai is a former Fulbright scholarship recipient, obtaining a B.A. in Public Relations and a B.A. in Organizational Communications from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Anai’s experience with corporate and nonprofit organizations, the media, and in political campaigns - at national, state and local levels - both in Latino and Anglo cultural contexts, allows her to effectively communicate at the grass root level, with the business community, with elected officials and the media, both in English and Spanish.

*This interview was conducted in 2009.*

### Early Life and Education

Anai Ibarra-Lopez was born January 22, 1964 in Guatemala to Edgar Ibarra and Martha Miriam Pineba. Both parents were political activists, constantly organizing for fair wages, equal representation, access to education, and for the reformation of land laws within their country. The Guatemalan army killed Ibarra-Lopez’s father, Edgar, due to his political activism when she and her fraternal twin sister were quite young; later, the army would also murder her second father, an economist, for his activism. As a result, Ibarra-Lopez’s family was marked for life; forced to remain quiet and change their lifestyle while many of their friends lived in exile, the family lived in the shadows and Martha, Ibarra-Lopez’s mother, raised four children on her own.

Ibarra-Lopez describes her mother as an incredibly strong woman who raised her in her own image. Despite their hardships, Ibarra-Lopez does not recall ever wanting for anything--certainly not attention or material possessions. Rather than being crippled by the repression that her family was subjected to, Ibarra-Lopez grew up with a very realistic impression that women are as strong and as capable as men

are. “I see myself as an equal to men,” Ibarra-Lopez says, “something that is not necessarily the case for many Latinas.”

Ibarra-Lopez attended the University of Arkansas at Little Rock on a Fulbright Scholarship and graduated with a B.A. in Public Relations and Organizational Communications. Back in Guatemala after graduation, a U.S. public relations firm hired Ibarra-Lopez as a general manager. She would later come to the U.S. with her husband, an American citizen, who had accepted a position at University of California at Los Angeles.

Upon moving to Los Angeles, Ibarra-Lopez started by volunteering in bilingual education. She did not want her children to lose their native language after moving to the United States (U.S.), and was concerned that they would not do well if they learned only English in school. It was through her involvement with other Spanish-speaking parents that Ibarra-Lopez first became aware of environmental justice issues. Though she had known previously that Los Angeles was extremely polluted, she did not realize that most people that were affected were people of color, and many of them had no one to turn to for help.

## **Career**

Ibarra-Lopez first paid position in the United States was doing public relations work for Semantic – a company targeting both the Latin American and U.S. Spanish-speaking markets. Ibarra-Lopez took this job because she felt it would be a good learning experience. She thought it provided an opportunity for her to learn how corporations worked from the inside. From her experience working in public relations in Guatemala, she knew that she was much more interested in clients who worked in social equity and social cost marketing rather than those pursuing corporate, for-profit work. When she realized that her employers focused their energies on searching for “terrorists” on the internet, she quit her job.

Ibarra-Lopez then went on to work with various political campaigns. She began working for the Kucinich campaign in Los Angeles as a volunteer because she felt strongly that he was sincere and believed in his position. Within two months, the campaign hired Ibarra-Lopez as the National Media Outreach Coordinator. Ibarra-Lopez considers Dennis Kucinich to be a very important mentor in her life. He inspired her to become more involved in politics because he was direct; stood up for his beliefs; was outspoken against the war; and spoke like an activist – not a politician.

Ibarra-Lopez’s current position at the Coalition for Clean Air (CCA) was created for her from a grant. Since she joined CAA, the organization has grown from five to twenty people. Her job is to engage communities of different constituencies – from community members to the Latino media to legislators and to educate them about air, toxics and environmental justice issues in and around Los Angeles. In addition, Ibarra-Lopez promotes the CCA to the public. She works on increasing public awareness of what the CCA does; this she hopes will help the organization to increase their membership and donor base.

## **Highlights**

Ibarra-Lopez believes that everyone has a voice and deserves to be heard. The highlight of her career has been the opportunity to reach very simple, humble people who feel that their stories may never be shared. Her career and life experience, as well as her ability to speak to people in their native tongue,

allows people to open up and feel more comfortable. Ibarra-Lopez believes her most significant achievement to be the role she plays in making it possible for workers to testify in front of legislators. The opportunity she has helped to create—to help people by interpreting what they are saying without changing their words—has empowered many people to feel confident enough to exercise their legal rights. Nothing tops being able to watch the faces of both sides engaged in dialogue, and to watch legislators open their eyes as the workers' stories unfold, Ibarra-Lopez says.

## **Advice to Young Professionals**

Ibarra-Lopez believes that minorities should seriously consider the pursuit of a career in the environmental field because it is a wonderful way to contribute to their own communities. “No one will do something for us unless we do it ourselves,” she states. “We play witness to injustices in our own communities. No one can tell the story better than the people themselves.”