

# finding the hidden audiences

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## Introduction

Extension and other human service organizations are becoming increasingly involved with racial minorities. Two major Extension programs—the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and 4-H Urban Youth Programs—include a significant number of racial minorities. These Extension programs have tried to identify individuals and families who could benefit from Extension's services. Extension staff in agriculture and community resource development are also trying to expand program services with minorities.

With this increased emphasis throughout Extension to work with minority groups, the need exists to identify organizational strategies that will increase staff effectiveness and efficiency with these audiences.

This article presents a strategy, based on sociological research and Extension experience that is highly effective and cost efficient as a procedure for identifying and contacting racial minority groups and organizations.

## Research Framework

The Polk County, Iowa, Extension staff asked the state Extension sociologist and area community resource development specialist for help in identifying the different racial minority groups and organizations. We reviewed the sociological literature in this area. We found no applied research studies that could provide us with specific information about techniques for carrying out the task. So, we considered different research techniques for obtaining this information. The two approaches considered were the survey approach and the key informant approach.

## Survey Approach

The survey approach<sup>1</sup> involves collecting information and data from a representative cross-section of the racial

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minority population in the geographical area being studied. The information is gathered by a carefully developed survey given to individuals identified by a scientific sampling procedure. Three different types of surveys could have been conducted: (1) personal (face-to-face) interviews, (2) telephone interviews, or (3) mailed questionnaires. The survey approach was rejected because of the lack of available staff, material resources, and the one-month deadline.

*Key Informant Approach*

The second research technique considered was called the key informant approach.<sup>2</sup> This approach seeks information from community residents who were in a key position to know the indigenous racial minority groups and organizations. Some of these key informants might include elected public officials, community leaders, agency administrators, and leaders of private and voluntary organizations.

The key informant approach involves first identifying people and organizations who know about the subject under study, and secondly interviewing these people using a standardized questionnaire. This approach was selected because of the minimal staff, material resources, and time needed.

**Organizational Strategy**

The basic strategy centered around the development of a comprehensive directory of racial minority groups and organizations on a county basis. The purpose of the directory was to help Extension staff in their program outreach into the minority community. It provided a comprehensive listing of indigenous racial minority groups and organizations. Public and private organizations providing services to racial minority groups would be included in this directory only if their services were specifically designated for racial minorities.

Racial minority groups identified in this directory were classified as members of protected classes by civil rights and affirmative action definitions and included: (1) Blacks, (2) Spanish surnamed, (3) American Indian or Native Americans, and (4) Asian Americans.

The data for the directory were compiled during a one-month period from numerous information sources including public, private, and voluntary organizations and leaders from each of the four racial minority groups living in the county.

These data were organized into a directory and presented by the state and area Extension staff to the county Extension staff during a series of three training meetings.

**Implementing Steps**

The steps taken to implement this organizational strategy can be outlined on a weekly basis.

- Week 1:*
- A. County Extension staff asked for help from state and area Extension staff to identify racial minority groups and organizations in Polk County.
  - B. State and area Extension staff immediately began working on this request.
  - C. State and area Extension administrators were advised of this project and their views asked for.
  - D. State and area Extension specialists met with county Extension staff to discuss the request and their specific needs and interests. Goals, objectives, procedures, and deadlines were discussed and agreed on.

- Week 2:*
- A. State and area Extension specialists met to discuss implementing the request. Implementation included the development of a directory and training sessions with the county staff on how to use the directory. The decision was made to use the key informant approach rather than the survey approach.

Key sources of information were identified as:

- 1) Area and county Extension professional staff, aides, and office staff.
  - 2) State, area, county, city, and neighborhood organizations concerned with civil rights, affirmative action, and low-income people.
  - 3) State, area, and county educational agencies.
  - 4) Libraries.
  - 5) State, area, and county human service planning organizations both public and private.
  - 6) Area, county, and city church groups.
  - 7) Universities and colleges.
  - 8) State, area, county, and city racial and ethnic organizations.
  - 9) Fund-raising organizations like the United Fund.
  - 10) Business organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and Small Business Bureau.
- B. The next step was to identify community leaders in the four racial and ethnic groups. These individuals reviewed this process and provided additional information to us about

our study. A master list of these organizations and individuals was compiled, and the state and area Extension staff members assumed responsibility for contacting and interviewing the different organizations and individuals. Based on conversations with the county Extension staff, we sought specific information about the racial minority groups and organizations. This information included:

- 1) Name of the organization or group.
- 2) Address and phone number.
- 3) Contact person.
- 4) Type of group—social, professional, educational, religious, service, business, etc.
- 5) Purpose of group.
- 6) Perceived knowledge of Extension programs.
- 7) Program areas of interest in home economics, 4-H and youth, agriculture, community development, and others.
- 8) Extension staff contacts and experiences with this group.

An interview schedule with these eight items was prepared. Two types of interviews were conducted: (1) face-to-face direct interview and (2) telephone. A mailed questionnaire was another technique used. During this week, the state Extension sociologist and the area community resource development specialist began contacting the sources of information and collecting data.

- Week 3:*
- A. Intensive interviewing and collection of data by the state and area Extension staff.
  - B. Discussions between state and area Extension staff about progress, problems, and readjustments in interviewing.
  - C. State staff began the tabulation of data.

- Week 4:*
- A. Completion of interviewing by state and area Extension staff.
  - B. Completion of the tabulation of data by state staff.
  - C. Setting up data and information into directory format.
  - D. Reproducing the directory.

- Weeks 5-7:* A. Distribution of directories to county Extension staff.  
 (*Training and follow-up*) B. Orientation and training of county Extension staff in effectively using the directory and its contents.  
 C. Meeting with racial minority leaders to discuss Extension use of the directory, as well as Extension working more effectively with racial minority audiences.

**Outcome and Results**

The county in which we conducted the survey is the largest urbanized county in the state. It has about 300,000 people and a racial minority population of about 20,000. When we started the survey, we anticipated finding about 40 different racial minority groups and organizations in this county. When we completed the survey 1 month later, we'd identified 120 racial minority groups and organizations—nearly 3 times as many as we'd anticipated. Most of the racial minority groups and organizations were either: (1) socially oriented such as fraternities, sororities, lodges, clubs or (2) religious. The majority of racial minority groups identified weren't low-income, leading us to be very cautious about using these terms together.

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Of the 120 racial minority groups and organizations, about 12% were composed of people who were college graduates and/or professionals. Many of these groups would be interested in our traditional Extension programs in agriculture, home economics, youth, and community development.

As a staff, we were surprised by the results of this survey. Most of us weren't aware of the large number of racial minority groups and organizations in the community and their diversity of background, needs, and interests. Prior to this study, most Extension programming with racial minorities had focused on low-income families and individuals. Based on this survey, the county Extension staff is reevaluating its programming goals, strategies, and techniques with racial minorities.

**Conclusion**

In the beginning of the project, some Extension staff had reservations about the possible negative community response—

would another survey provide any significant new information about the racial minority community? However, the survey, study, and training proved to be a good learning experience for the Extension staff at the county, area, and state level. The organizations and groups we contacted and the minority leaders involved were cooperative and complimentary about Extension efforts.

The racial minority directory has helped the county Extension staff fulfill affirmative action requirement procedures. The county Extension director has received many requests for this information from other organizations in the community, and he has published a condensed form of the directory, which is available on request.<sup>3</sup> We believe that the overall community image of the Extension Service and the university has been improved by this study.

### Footnotes

1. Frank Fear and others, *Conference Workbook*, Sociology Report No. 133A (Ames: Iowa State University, March, 1977).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Ober J. Anderson, *A Directory of Racial Minority Organizations and Groups in Polk County* (Des Moines, Iowa: Polk County Extension Office, June, 1977).