

Collaborating Across State Lines to Leverage Cultural Competency Expertise

Abstract

A statewide need for Latino cultural competency training for Utah State University (USU) Extension personnel was identified. The solution involved the collaborative efforts of our team of two USU Extension faculty members and one Washington State University (WSU) Extension faculty member on adaption and customization of a needs assessment tool and a training program originated at WSU. Our collaboration leveraged important limited resources such as subject-matter expertise, training materials, time, and funding while providing a venue for feedback and ideas to improve, update, and enhance an existing program. Garnering administrative support from the start is key to successful cross-state collaborative work and implementation of specialized training to expand Latino outreach capacity in Extension.

Keywords: [Latino cultural competency](#), [collaboration](#), [subject-matter expertise](#), [training](#), [Latino outreach](#)

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Introduction

Collaboration in Extension across organizations leverages limited assets such as subject-matter expertise, training resources, time, and funding. One organization may identify and address specific training needs by developing resources that another organization may also find useful. Collaborating across state lines in Extension is not uncommon. For example, after conducting needs assessments, Extension trainers in Virginia and North Carolina teamed to develop educational materials for a joint communication series based on shared goals (Greiner & Hampton, 2016). During the needs assessment stage, they found that faculty at both institutions involved had similar training needs, and after the training, all participants expressed high satisfaction with it (Greiner & Hampton, 2016). Collaboration can take on many forms. This article illustrates how a short-term collaboration initiative occurred between Utah State University (USU) Extension and Washington State University (WSU) Extension. Latino cultural competency subject-matter experts from both institutions worked together on adapting and customizing a WSU needs assessment tool and a training program to meet the needs of USU Extension faculty.

Understanding the Need for Latino Cultural Competency Training

Census data indicate increasing Latino populations in the United States. The proportion comprising the Latino population rose from approximately 6.5% in 1980 to almost 18% by 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Utah has experienced similar demographic changes for a number of years, and Latinos constitute its largest minority, at 14% of the state's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). An underserved group, Latinos in Utah bear the consequences of inequities—with gaps in areas such as health, well-being, and youth academic achievement. Moreover, Latinos participate in Extension activities in low numbers, a fact confirmed in a recent survey of USU Extension faculty (Wille & Garcia, 2017).

Culturally Responsive Programs Increase Minority Participation

We know that "to successfully engage Latino audiences, particularly first- and second-generation Latinos, programs must be culturally responsive; that is, they must reflect the cultural traditions, beliefs, and values of the people" (Hobbs, 2004, para.2). With respect to Extension specifically, research has shown that Latino participation increases dramatically with culturally responsive programs (Hobbs, 2004). Guion and Brown (2010) suggested that to serve Latinos, Extension educators must "become more culturally aware, responsive, and competent" (para. 4). The authors further stated that "the cornerstone of cultural competence is a better understanding of individuals within the cultural groups that we currently serve and/or desire to serve" (Guion & Brown, 2010, para. 1). For example, traditional program marketing strategies that work for mainstream Extension audiences do not always work for Latino families. Email invitations or flyers may fail to attract Latinos to events if the community prefers to develop personal relationships with organizers prior to participating in unfamiliar activities.

Culturally Diverse Programs Preserve Extension's Future

By taking time to learn about the cultural backgrounds, histories, values, and norms of Latinos, Extension educators can create more effective Latino outreach efforts and programs. Developing cultural capacity for working with Latinos also affects Extension professionals' appreciation for diversity. As their cultural awareness grows, so do their abilities to adapt programming to the needs of diverse populations, maintaining the future viability of Extension as an organization.

Methods and Findings

Assessing USU Faculty Latino Outreach, Training, and Support Needs

In carrying out the project we report here, we represented Extension programs from two states. Authors Garcia and Wille, from USU Extension, reached out to author Garcia-Pabón, from WSU, to draw from his extensive experience as a Latino program specialist. Since 2012, Garcia-Pabón has offered professional education on working with the Latino community. His expertise helped guide our assessment of the current state of Latino outreach in USU Extension and faculty training needs. The assessment included questions to identify past and present Latino outreach efforts, including

- programs provided,
- success achieved, and

- interest in resources and training.

Providing full endorsement, USU Extension administration distributed an online survey to reach all faculty in the USU Extension system. Of the 380 faculty and staff on the official Extension electronic mailing list who received the survey, 159 responded. Having full support from the highest level of administration led to a 42% response rate. The assessment confirmed a significant need for training on cultural competency and Latino outreach in Utah. Tables 1 and 2 highlight the survey findings.

Table 1.

Latino Outreach Needs Among Utah Extension Professionals

Extension faculty interest	%^a
Cultural concerns and issues when working with Latino audiences	88
Best practices for reaching out to and communicating with Latino audiences	85
Participating in a Latino cultural competency 1-day workshop	68
Accessing resources in Spanish to support programming	71

^aModerate to high interest responses only.

Table 2.

Level of Latino
Participation in
Extension Programs

Participation level	%
No participation	20.21
Low participation	51.06
Moderate participation	24.47
High participation	4.26

Adopting and Adapting Resources

With these findings, we then engaged in the process of sharing, reviewing, and adapting for use in Utah resources and training materials on Latino cultural competency already available from WSU Extension. We provided a full-day Latino cultural competency workshop in a central location. The workshop was offered to faculty from the 15 counties in Utah with highest Latino population concentrations, which ranged from 8.8% to 17.6%. Postworkshop survey results showed that participants highly rated the training and reported an increased comfort level for engaging in Latino outreach. Participants also identified more than 40 ways to reach out to Latinos. Those outreach efforts ranged from finding Latino 4-H volunteers and writing Latino programming grants to adapting and developing Latino-specific programs.

Benefits and Implications

Collaborating to access WSU Extension faculty expertise on Latino cultural competency and outreach, and

customizing an agenda for a training workshop to fit the needs in USU Extension produced many benefits with important implications. We determined that partnering across state lines allows Extension professionals to

- streamline resources and save time by using already developed, ready-to-use assessments, curricula, and other program materials;
- capitalize on peer experience in subject matter;
- customize another state's tools and resources to meet the needs of local audiences and programs (e.g., providing paper/pencil versus online surveys); and
- improve, update, and enhance programs through mutually beneficial collaborations.

Garnering administrative support from the start is key to successful cross-state collaborative work for assessing Latino outreach needs and providing training at the district, region, or state level. Administrative backing can include program endorsement through direct emailing and financial and logistic support. It also legitimizes the need for any type of cultural competency training across the organization. This support can increase efforts to engage with underserved audiences across the state Extension system.

Extension needs to be in tune and remain relevant regarding the educational needs of the nation's diverse communities. Local and state challenges to reach underserved audiences are mirrored across the country. Collaborating across state lines to leverage cultural competency expertise, as our example shows, can enable and expedite Extension's work to engage with underserved audiences.

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