

### Culturally Diverse Advisory Boards



Recognizing the community we serve is critical to Extension success. Engaging and inviting community members to participate in the design, development and orchestration of programs for the community are important steps toward building significant relationships with clientele and particularly advisory boards and volunteers. Advisory board members and Extension volunteers should represent a variety of viewpoints, bringing innovative ideas and new perspectives to the Cooperative Extension program. Advisory boards, committees and volunteers play a significant role in making programs relevant and effective in the community.

**Ask: When extension community programs are designed and planned solely by the county staff, what risks are inherent in establishing community support and clientele participation? Share some examples of Extension programs planned independently as a staff and those planned in conjunction with community advisory boards and volunteers. Are there times when committee, volunteer and advisory board input may not be beneficial to programs?**

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Extension units with culturally integrate advisory boards are a conduit for increasing community involvement as faculty and staff develop community based programs. Integrated advisory boards when combined with Extension faculty can gain valuable information about the needs and wants of the represented community. This approach makes Extension programs and services more relevant, connected and meaningful to the communities served. Another great resource to Extension units is culturally diverse program volunteers. Both volunteers and advisory board members can serve as cultural mediators or cultural guides in working with diverse groups in the community. These “Cultural Guides” bring to the table a vast amount of experience with cultures that may be unfamiliar to Extension faculty. The Cultural Guides can help the faculty understand

traditions, beliefs, practices and other elements of a culture. They are a key to assisting the faculty in breaking through cultural barriers to connect on a more intimate level with diverse ethnic communities.

**Ask: What process might this Extension unit use to identify Cultural Guides and volunteers that can help Extension design and deliver programs to diverse ethnic communities within the geographical area of the unit? Are there key leaders that could be identified from past program participation? What problems might occur when the unit identifies a “token” Cultural Guide to extension committees and boards?**

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Cultural Guides can assist county faculty in establishing relationships with community opinion leaders, gatekeepers, political and ecclesiastical leaders. Cultural Guides may be a further resource as co-teachers in many instructional settings. A Cultural Guide may be willing to engage in a teaching and learning process when approached from a position of equality and shared meaning. When faculty reaches out and makes a genuine effort to increase knowledge and awareness of others, they are often met with positive responses. It is important to recognize that Cultural Guides can be both formal and informal leaders in ethnic communities. We must recognize that sometimes formal Cultural Guides are not necessarily viewed as representing the best

interest of the community.

**Ask: Are there key Cultural Guides that can be identified from past program participation? What potential problems might occur when the Extension unit views the Cultural Guide as “the voice” for their community? How can Extension avoid the concept of “tokenism” when selecting and inviting Cultural Guides to become an integral part of the Extension units program planning committee?**



Extension faculty and staff should seek consultation with more than one Cultural Guide in order to broaden program perspective. Cultural Guides may prove invaluable in helping faculty and staff:

1. Plan how lessons are taught – maximizing learning style preferences;
2. Select activities and learning experiences that will be most effective and meaningful;
3. Design marketing approaches;
4. Obtain other volunteers from within the cultural group.

Some basic lessons about creating effective and diverse boards, working groups and volunteer teams are listed below:

1. Agree on reasons for seeking diversity.
2. Staff the nominating committee with as much diversity as possible.
3. Seek candidates who not only are members of the target group but are also committed to the Extensions mission.
4. Define expectations for all board members and volunteers.
5. Establish a system for orienting new members and for continuous development of board members and volunteers.
6. Reach out beyond immediate circles to find potential candidates.
7. Understand the pitfalls of expecting persons of color to represent all the people of their cultural or ethnic background.