

Planning Programs to Break Down Cultural Barriers



Have you ever been to a program/event where you felt like instructors/organizers were just going through “the motions” or were basically unengaged as leaders? Perhaps you felt a little disconnected with the experience. Did you feel that the organizer/instructors were concerned about you and the learning environment created? How did you feel at such an event? Did you find the program/event met your needs? Did you find yourself saying, that you will never return to another program/event sponsored by this organization?



There are many elements that must be considered in building an outstanding program/event in which both the instructors/organizers and the clientele connect meaningfully in the learning environment. These considerations are amplified when dealing with culturally and ethnically diverse audiences. Trust is at the very heart of creating meaningful connections and enhancing learning. At programs/events developing an atmosphere of mutual respect and an acknowledgement of cultural understanding will enhance cross-cultural communications and positively impact the experience of participants..



What program planning principles and practices can Extension program/event organizers apply when developing programs/events for diverse audiences?

[Ideas might include :how technologies are to be used, language barriers and communications, speed of instructional presentation, development of written materials and illustrations, the length of the presentation/event, time of day and day of the week of the presentation/event, etc.]



Learning about cultural differences, customs and beliefs of potential participants from diverse audiences will help to strengthen relationships and trust, thus promoting good cross cultural communications. Extension professionals who understand cultural traditions, norms, practices values and the audiences preferred learning styles will insure a more

meaningful learning experience when working with diverse audiences. Talking to cultural insiders or a cultural guide can help one avoid barriers that may decrease effectiveness at the event/program. Cultural guides can help determine activities and experiences that would be most effective and meaningful to the specific cultural or ethnic group. They may also be effective in helping to determine best marketing approaches and techniques to use in reaching culturally diverse audiences.



When planning culturally relevant programs/events what are some of the issues or concerns that should be addressed to make the event/program more attuned to the needs of diverse audiences? Make a list.



Along with those areas we have identified in our discussion consider these twelve strategies as a valuable roadmap toward finding common ground with diverse audiences:

1. Develop programs to address the "real-life, felt or expressed needs" of the community.
 2. Offer programs in familiar surroundings: neighborhood churches, schools, etc.
 3. Meet in a location serviced by public transportation systems if necessary.
 4. Take childcare needs into account when planning Extension services if necessary.
 5. Offer culturally appropriate door prizes or refreshments.
 6. Take cultural holidays and community gatherings into consideration so that your programs do not conflict.
 7. Dress appropriately and respectfully for the culture group you are serving.
 8. Select visuals that reflect the cultural and ethnic identity of the community.
 9. Use materials written at an appropriate level and in the appropriate language.
 10. Use examples that are relevant and meaningful to the community.
 11. Involve cultural guides and diverse volunteers in program design and implementation.
 12. Identify and use the appropriate teaching style to address preferred learning styles.
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In order to build trust with diverse audiences and make meaningful connections, an atmosphere of understanding, respect, and support for cultural diversity must be created. Knowledge of the history, culture, traditions, customs, language or dialect, values, religious or spiritual beliefs, art, music, learning styles, and practices of a cultural group is vital to Extension professionals when laying the foundation for true connections to occur. The desire to understand another culture and open the lines of communication builds respect and trust between diverse audiences and Extension professionals.