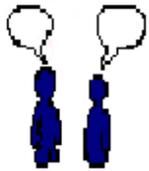


Reaching Diverse Audiences through Utah Extension



Explain

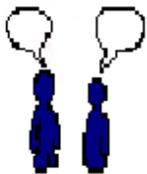
Ask: What changes have occurred in the Utah population in the past ten years? Clearly Utah's demographics are undergoing a major change requiring Utah Extension to reach out with equity to all audiences across the state. The recognition that Extension is a publicly funded entity whose mission it is to serve all audiences is foremost to success. The diverse populations present in all Utah counties present opportunities for enriching extension class programs by bringing new ideas and thoughts to extension activities. With this change of demographics extension can expect (1) a change in political power structures on both the local and state levels; (2) the need to development political advocacy is critical to extensions' future in the state; and (3) diverse audiences with the increased financial viability that can bring potential financial support to Extension programs.



Discuss

Ask: What are some of the barriers to reaching out to diverse audiences in extension programming?
One of the main barriers to reaching diverse audiences is fear of the unknown and fear of differences. Some in Extension find it difficult to initiate contact and build relationships with individuals that they have not worked with in the past. Often this is because they know little about these individuals and their life's' cultural experiences. We tend to gravitate to and program for individuals who make us most comfortable in relationships.

Ask: How can we become more comfortable with individuals from potentially diverse audiences?



Discuss

Thoughts about the unknown are based on our perceptions. Perceptions are influenced by experiences, beliefs, values and environment. People who behave, think or look different from you may bring out negative perceptions and reactions. These perceptions and stereotypes function as a negative lens that may influence your own personal actions and behaviors. Allowing these negative lenses to taint your actions and behaviors while working with diverse audiences may present a major barrier in acceptance by diverse groups.



Explain

Understanding and communicating with a diverse group is a behavior that is a learned skill or habit. A habit is defined as a point where desire, knowledge and skill meet. Having an understanding of any personal bias that may cloud your judgment can be overcome by personal desire, knowledge and skill. This discussion of reaching diverse audiences demonstrates the desire of this group to more meaningfully meet the needs of such audiences.

Ask: What are some of the strategies we might employ to begin reaching diverse audiences?



Listen for responses similar to:

Be an active learner: Participating in diversity seminars or reading a diversity discussion will not provide you with all the knowledge you need. Active learning involves lifestyle changes. It involves actively seeking opportunities to engage in dialog with diverse individuals. It involves getting involved in their community, etc.

Use critical thinking: Learn to avoid errors of perception, judgment and premature reactions. Learn to recognize potential stereotypes and prejudicial statements sometimes heard from others. Insist on accurate information. Validate that the information is true for the specific individuals that you are working with or trying to work with.

Look at the humanity in everyone: There are some universal goals that all groups desire no matter what their socioeconomic condition may be. These goals include health, safety, education, economic security, and the best for their children. These commonalities help us to recognize the humanity in everyone.

It is easy to value commonalities in people. It is far more difficult to honor, appreciate and respect differences.



When embracing diversity, we must become aware of and celebrate the differences that are based on cultural values, norms, practices and other factors. The on –the-job learning and interaction with diverse audiences will enhance your ability as an effective extension educator. As you seek to interact with diverse communities you will increasingly find commonalities to embrace bringing you to a full sense of community.