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Latino Volunteerism in the 4-H Youth Development Program

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Nationally, the 4-H Youth Development Program utilizes more than 350,000 adult volunteers annually, and 25% of the nation's K-12 students identify as Hispanic or Latino; however, there is a dearth of published literature on Latino volunteerism in the 4-H Youth Development Program. Developmental relationships, a critical component of realizing youth development outcomes, are enhanced when adults and young people share cultural values and identity markers. The Cooperative Extension System has an obligation to reach a diverse audience and ensure program participation reflects the demographics of the communities in which youth live. We review the literature on Latino volunteerism in 4-H, share what we learned implementing the 2016-2019 University of California 4-H Latino Initiative, and provide our reflections and recommendations.

Keywords: 4-H youth development, Latino volunteerism, Latino 4-H volunteers

Introduction

As part of the U.S. Land-grant university system, 4-H reaches over six million youth aged 5 to 18 annually through different delivery modes, including in-school, afterschool, community clubs, residential camps, day camps, and other program models using a positive youth development framework and experiential learning approach. Specific to club and camp program models, there are more than 350,000 adult volunteers (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018). Traditionally, in organized 4-H community clubs and residential camps, volunteers serve in direct delivery roles to cultivate developmental, positive, and sustained relationships between youth and adults (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). Volunteers help young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities, and learn how to contribute to their communities (Lerner, 2007). Thus, volunteers are directly responsible for realizing the mission of the 4-H youth development program. Volunteerism, of course, is a two-way road. While youth benefit from their developmental relationships with adults, the adult volunteers themselves also benefit, developing skills, improving well-being, and deepening connections with others (Worker et al., 2020).

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While 4-H has served many young people well, community clubs and residential camp programs – two of the original 4-H program models – have primarily served youth from dominant social groups and have been less successful serving marginalized youth, youth of color, or youth from non-dominant social groups (Russell & Van Campen, 2011). Today, the U.S. population demographics have shifted and are projected to become racially and ethnically diverse over the next 50 years. Developmental relationships are enhanced when adults and young people share cultural values and identity markers. In other words, youth need to see themselves reflected in their adult role models to better form a sense of belonging (Vega et al., 2016). To make this happen, 4-H professionals need to adapt approaches to volunteerism to better recruit, prepare, and retain adult volunteers of color. While 4-H professionals may utilize a wide array of delivery modes to grow programming, targeting growth will require 4-H professionals to have competence in adapting programming to be culturally relevant. This challenge involves altering, contesting, or forming new traditions to achieve success in recruiting diverse volunteers. Recruiting Latino volunteers is an opportunity to grow 4-H programs, and one of the most fundamental parts to increase Latino youth engagement is to better recruit, prepare, and retain Latino adult volunteers.

4-H Youth Development Latino Volunteerism

The 4-H organization is a nationally recognized youth development program part of the Cooperative Extension System, a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Land Grant Universities, and local governments. As a publicly funded program, 4-H has a legal (and moral) obligation to ensure program participation reflects the communities in which youth live. One tenet of 4-H is programs aligned with scientifically valid youth development research (i.e., research-informed practice). However, there is a dearth of empirical literature on Latino volunteerism in the 4-H youth development program. The lack of research is shocking given that 18% of the U.S. population, and 25% of the nation's K-12 students, identify as Hispanic/Latino (Bauman, 2017; United States Census Bureau, 2020). Furthermore, to realize the goal of reaching 10 million youth by 2025 nationally (National 4-H Council, 2019), and the imminent need to increase diversity and inclusion in the 4-H program, developing culturally relevant and appropriate resources for Latino volunteers will be essential for creating programs that reflect cultural values and identity markers for youth.

Confronting the Myth that "Latinos do not Volunteer"

We have heard Extension professionals comment that Latino culture does not emphasize volunteering and blame this as the cause for challenges in recruiting adult Latino volunteers and growing their programs. Our experience has shown these comments to be false. We have come to understand that Latinos may not volunteer in the same way as those from other cultural groups, particularly from white mainstream American culture. As shared by Hobbs (2001), "Latinos do not volunteer in the traditional American pattern … Latinos do not think of their

contributions as volunteering" (Findings, 1st para.). The value of giving back to one's community is shared by many Latino cultures. For example, indigenous Oaxacan tribes (in present-day Mexico) referred to a concept of *tequio* (also referred to as *guendalizaá* in Zapotec or *tz'ian tz'on* in Amuzgo), a philanthropic concept for communal work (Fox & Riversa-Salgado, 2004; Layton, 2004). Tequio describes an obligation of community members to provide services or contribute resources for a collective project to benefit the community. The tequio cultural value persists today in many Latino cultures, and "giving back to family and community" is shared by youth, adults, and families.

Latino Volunteerism in 4-H

Volunteerism research may be conceptually and pragmatically organized in a *volunteer process model,* beginning with the antecedents of and motivations for volunteering; followed by volunteer roles, experiences, and satisfaction; and concluding with the consequences of volunteering (Wilson, 2000, 2012). This model proved productive in previous volunteer-oriented research (Kok et al., 2020; Worker et al., 2020); thus, we adopted the model for the present paper. Overall, the literature specific to 4-H youth development volunteerism has focused primarily on the antecedents and preparation for volunteer roles.

The most cited literature on Latino volunteerism in 4-H has been work authored by Beverly B. Hobbs (2000, 2001, 2004, 2007) and Hobbs and Sawer (2009), based on experiences with Oregon State University Extension System. The National 4-H Council's *Latino Youth Outreach: Best Practices Toolkit* (2016) was based heavily on Hobbs's work. The publications by Hobbs identify several significant lessons to engaging Latinos in the 4-H program: (a) easier to recruit Latino youth for 4-H than it was to recruit Latino adults as volunteers; (b) Latino adult volunteers, with their frequent use of Spanish, and similar cultural experiences helped create a sense of belonging for youth; (c) 4-H professionals found it easier to recruit when asking for shorter-term commitments while using the term "help" instead of "volunteer"; and (d) that 4-H professionals need to plan additional time for volunteers to learn about 4-H practices and culture.

Hobbs (2001, 2007) shared that 4-H professionals need to discover and address why Latinos do not want to volunteer, e.g., language, lack of trust, lack of information on the role, and commitment. Hobbs also reported that 4-H professionals should be aware that Latino adults are very familiar with helping (informal, unplanned, part of life), so not to assume recruiting Latino volunteers is a hard sell. Finally, Hobbs recommended building a relationship first and asking to volunteer second; nothing substitutes a personal relationship with the Latino community. The notion of relationship-building is further supported by Sousa et al. (2007), who conducted interviews with California Latinos about why they became and stayed involved with community projects. They found that relationship building was essential to build trust, informal invitations for a specific task were more effective than an ongoing commitment, information needed to come from trusted sources (e.g., promotoras – community advocates), and adults were more

likely to participate in community activities if their child was involved or if the activity involved the whole family. Additionally, Fábregas Janeiro and Carrasco (2015) reported on practices to recruit volunteers, including (a) taking time to build a relationship with the Latino community, (b) introducing oneself to the natural leaders of the community and asking for help, (c) clearly explaining the nature of the commitment, (d) creating an environment that reflects the culture of the Latino community. Finally, Hobbs and Sawer (2009) added that 4-H professionals will need to adapt traditions and practices to respect Latino culture while providing additional orientation to the context and the culture related to 4-H and link to the University.

The published literature on preparing and training 4-H volunteers has primarily originated from existing white American adults, resulting in lists of competencies (Stone & Edwards, 2008) and formats (Kok et al., 2020); the literature largely lacks specific strategies relative to volunteer preparation for Latinos. In one of the few published studies, Morales Osegueda (2012) reported on a Washington State University Extension program that provided training to Latino adults and teenagers on 4-H culture, volunteerism, developmental stages, and experiential learning. Fourteen participants had never attended formal leadership volunteerism training yet reported improving knowledge and intended to apply it in the future.

Opportunities

Reaching Latino youth in 4-H programs is strengthened by engaging Latino adult 4-H volunteers (National 4-H Council, 2016). However, the historical "culture of 4-H," including the traditions, routines, and activity patterns, can be a deterrent in welcoming new adult volunteers from other cultures. For example, the traditional 4-H practice of designating one adult as the "club leader" and youth as "officers" may deter those from a collectivist culture, reciting the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance may deter non-citizens, or competitive activities and individual recognition may deter those from group-oriented cultures. The challenge to the 4-H professional is finding ways to make inroads with the Latino culture; identify potential volunteers; help them prepare to be a 4-H volunteer; and ensure 4-H programs are culturally relevant, welcoming, and promote a sense of belonging. To better connect with Latinos, 4-H professionals need to prioritize relationships with individuals and not rely on institutional credentials (Fábregas Janeiro & Horrillo, 2017).

To realize the national 4-H goal to reach 10 million young people by 2025 and given that 4-H relies heavily on volunteers to extend its reach with youth, 4-H professionals must begin to diversify their volunteer base. The majority of the literature related to engaging new audiences focuses on designing culturally relevant programs and not specifically on the recruitment and preparation of volunteers that share cultural values and identity markers of the target community's young people.

2016-2019 University of California 4-H Latino Initiative

In 2016, University of California (UC), Agriculture and Natural Resources began an initiative to improve the reach of 4-H programs in a variety of program delivery modes (community clubs, camps, in-school, and afterschool clubs) with Latino youth and families. The UC 4-H Latino Initiative allocated funding to recruit six Latino bilingual bicultural 4-H professionals responsible for coordinating Latino programming and volunteer recruitment efforts in six counties. As new programs were implemented, professionals recruited Latino teenage and adult volunteers to serve in direct delivery roles. Over three years, even when the number of Latino 4-H members increased, recruiting adult volunteers proved challenging; the percent change in volunteers by county was mixed. The largest increase was 35% in one year, while the largest decrease was (negative) 40% (Worker, 2019). This paper shares lessons from the perspectives of Latino volunteers around recruitment, training, and building relationships.

Methods

Interviews with Latino Teenage and Adult Volunteers

The academics involved with the UC 4-H Latino Initiative explored the experiences of teenage and adult volunteers recruited to deliver programming as part of the Initiative. The research was reviewed by the University of California, Davis Institutional Review Board. We approached our investigation with qualitative interview methods near the end of the second year of the Initiative. We used a purposive snowball sampling method, where 4-H professionals identified volunteers to interview. In spring 2018, 23 youth and adult volunteers participated in one of five focus group interviews and one individual interview (as outlined by Krueger & Casey, 2015). The sessions were facilitated by a UC 4-H academic, lasted from 21 to 78 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed (see Table 1). Five interviews were conducted in English; one was conducted in Spanish. The protocol was developed by the evaluation team, consisting of nine UC academics. The protocol included of twelve question stems, including recruitment ("Tell us how you got involved in 4-H"), their direct delivery role ("Thinking about a typical 4-H meeting, what do you do … what works well"), preparation ("What helped you prepare to be involved with 4-H?" and "What additional support would have been helpful?"), and how the volunteer personally benefitted ("What, if anything, have you learned because of 4-H?"); see Appendix.

We analyzed data with deductive thematic analysis, a qualitative method used to identify patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using four predetermined categories (recruitment/retention, training/orientation, relationships, and outcomes). The analysis was distributed across multiple analysts (three co-authors) and multiple data sources (six interviews) (Patton, 2015). Each researcher individually coded their respective data source, segmenting data into one of the predetermined categories. The categories were based on the volunteer process model (Wilson, 2012): (1) antecedents of volunteering (our categories: recruitment and retention), (2) experiences of volunteering (our categories: training and relationships), and (3) consequences of

volunteering (our category: volunteer outcomes). Together, we identified common patterns within the transcripts within the categories.

Table 1. Interview Data (n=23)

Session	Time & Language
Group 1 (2 teenage Latinas)	21 minutes, English
Group 2 (6 adult & 1 teenagers; 2 males, 4 females)	78 minutes, Spanish
Group 3 (10 teenagers; 3 White, 2 Black, 5 Latino; 4 males, 6 females)	37 minutes, English
Group 4 (2 adult females; 1 White, 1 Latina)	64 minutes, English
Individual 5 (1 adult Latina)	31 minutes, English
Group 6 (2 adults; 1 White male, 1 Latina)	63 minutes, English

Findings

Recruitment and Retention of Latino Volunteers

Three primary reasons became evident in the transcripts about how and why teenagers and adults began and continued as 4-H volunteers.

First, people had to become aware of opportunities to volunteer in 4-H. The most common method to recruit teenagers was presentations conducted by 4-H professionals at high schools during class time. Teenagers were invited to act as teachers for elementary school-aged youth (known as teenagers-as-teachers). One teenager shared that, "I love kids. … Kids are definitely one of my passions, and that's why I wanted to help volunteer" (White female, 16 years old, group 3). A few other teenagers described needing to complete a project (or fulfill community service hours). Adults typically described being recommended to 4-H by a friend and then invited to volunteer after their own children were involved: "I became involved in this for the well-being of my children because I needed something in which she could develop more" (Latina adult, group 2).

Second, a trusting and positive relationship with the 4-H professional was key to volunteers deepening their involvement and remaining as volunteers. 4-H professionals and their relationship were the "glue" that retained volunteers. The words and terms used to describe this relationship indicated that for many teenagers and adults, the 4-H professional is what kept them involved and not an investment in the organization itself. The Latino culture emphasizes person-to-person relationships, and this was reflected in how volunteers spoke about developing relationships with 4-H professionals, often becoming friends beyond 4-H.

Third, as volunteers served in their direct delivery roles, they began to develop caring relationships with the young people (members). Volunteers reported enjoyment from participating in 4-H activities and a desire to explore involvement with other 4-H programs. One volunteer enjoyed participating in 4-H because she could "build relationships with the kids. See their face light up when they see you and yelling your name or just telling us how was their day.

That makes my day" (Latina, 17 years old, group 3). Volunteers who participated in a broader array of 4-H activities described 4-H as a community and feeling a sense of belonging.

Preparation and Training for Volunteer Role

The amount of time, content of orientation, and training varied by county program. At the bare minimum, all new 4-H adult volunteers were required to complete two and a half hours of online courses, conducted in English, covering an introduction to the 4-H organization; creating a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment; positive youth development, and risk management. Adult volunteers we spoke with commonly reported online modules were not relevant and did not provide enough information pertaining to the direct delivery roles undertaken by the adults. Almost all adults, as well as the teenage volunteers, shared that they learned in their role, learning-by-doing, and "not necessarily the training, my [training] was learned by experience" (Latina adult, individual 5).

Two groups of teenage volunteers reported receiving structured training. For example, two attended a two-day session learning to facilitate a curriculum where "We actually saw a preview of it from somebody who had already done it. … I felt like that helped give us an idea of how it had to be run here, locally" (Latina, 16 years old, group 1). Beyond the curriculum, however, teenagers asked for more preparation on group management and behavior management. One Latina teenage volunteer responded that "learning how to communicate with the kids is something you learn as you're working with them" and went on to say it would have been helpful for her to have training to "deal with kids who aren't nice to each other" (White female, 16 years old, group 3)

The general lack of formal training and the expectations relevant to their roles as 4-H volunteers is an opportunity for future improvement. Formal preparation is important, in addition to "learning by doing," and should be intentional and relevant to the volunteer's role. Indeed, one volunteer stated that "the training part of it, always important. Always important" (Latina adult, individual 5). The teenagers that received more formal in-person training spoke to its benefits in boosting their confidence to work with younger youth and facilitate lesson plans.

Building Positive Relationships with Young People

Volunteers reported enjoying working with youth and how they sought to improve a sense of welcoming and belonging through their actions and interactions with youth. Volunteers spoke about what they did to connect and get to know the youth with whom they worked to ensure they felt welcome. A teenage volunteer mentioned, "You have to find ways to connect with every student individually" (Latina, 18 years old, group 1). Other volunteers described intentional efforts to make youth and parents feel welcome and included: "We've really, really worked on making sure people feel welcome, that they're included, that everybody is involved" (Latina adult, individual 5). Volunteers also reported showing a personal interest and investment in

youth. Making youth feel welcome shared the sense that youth were valued, heard, and supported and that we all – youth, teenagers, and adults – were part of a team.

Latino Volunteer Outcomes

While youth outcomes are the primary focus for 4-H, we also asked about positive benefits experienced by Latino volunteers. Volunteers described several benefits from their involvement, including strengthening teaching abilities, increasing intercultural awareness, and self-improvement. By facilitating curriculum activities, many volunteers said they learned the subject matter as well as strengthening their teaching abilities:

> We stand back and watch … that's hard at times … educators tend to be control people … but we stand back, and we watch, and we see the transformation of our children. … They're only gonna learn if they experience it and they do it. (Latina adult, individual 5)

Volunteers' reports of their own development demonstrate that they grew alongside youth participants.

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Reflections

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Giving back is a core cultural value in Latino communities. As a result, Latinos are interested in volunteering. When supported with culturally relevant volunteer experiences, Latinos were willing to play significant roles in shaping the lives of young people. The literature – and our empirical evidence – agree that relationships are critical to working with Latino volunteers in recruitment and as an ongoing part of the program, between professionals and volunteers and volunteers and youth.

Recruitment practices need to utilize culturally relevant terminology that resonates with Latinos when describing what a volunteer experience looks like. We learned that descriptors like "teach" and "lead" are terms typically reserved for people with authority, education, or specialized training. As such, using these terms in recruiting Latino volunteers may create feelings of being unqualified to be a volunteer. Another barrier was the perception that the volunteers cannot "add" value to the 4-H experience because they do not have the knowledge to lead a project. Consequently, talking about volunteerism in the context of "helping," "giving," and "sharing" may resonate better and create a space where Latinos can envision themselves making meaningful contributions. Relying on others who had built trust and identifying and contacting a local leader helped facilitate the conversation with the future volunteers.

The UC 4-H Latino Initiative achieved success by reaching more Latino youth (Worker, 2019), showing that youth in new programs had similar experiences and realized similar youth development outcomes to youth in 4-H community clubs (Worker et al., 2020), and reporting on experiences of newly hired bilingual professionals (Worker et al., 2019).

Our methodology had limitations. While the protocol was standard, interviews were conducted by multiple individuals and resulted in mixed quality and consistency. Additionally, the selection of individuals interviewed differed between counties, resulting in some longer-tenured adults being invited who were not newly recruited 4-H volunteers, only new to the recently implemented 4-H Latino Initiative programs. Furthermore, we neglected to ask explicitly about these volunteers' experiences of ethnicity, culture, or diversity pertaining to their 4-H experience. Despite these limitations, our findings contribute to the sparse published literature regarding Latino volunteerism in 4-H youth development.

Boosting Latino Volunteerism in 4-H: The Role of 4-H Professionals

We know that relationship building is key for successful program development. We also know that outreach must be intentional. A positive relationship with a 4-H professional is a key factor in recruiting and retaining Latino volunteers. Relationship building takes time, so 4-H professionals cannot be laissez-faire about this commitment. Professionals also need to be supported by their supervisors and senior leadership.

The success of the UC 4-H Latino Initiative in expanding 4-H reach to Latino audiences was strongly connected to having fiscal resources to hire bilingual and bicultural professionals. While bilingual and bicultural professionals resulted in gains to volunteer recruitment, culturally relevant program implementation, community relationships, and clientele numbers reached, after funding ended, we learned how challenging it was to sustain, let alone expand these gains. Only two of the original bilingual and bicultural professionals remain employed to continue outreach programming and nurture relationships. Attempts to replicate outreach programming using existing non-bilingual / non-bicultural professionals were stifled. Anecdotally, 4-H professionals cited "lack of time," position descriptions and annual evaluations not emphasizing reaching diverse youth, and heavy workload from existing 4-H programming as reasons for not expanding their reach to Latino audiences.

As such, the question then becomes, *"How do we help existing 4-H professionals reprioritize their work and shift their responsibilities to provide more intensive support for implementing new programs?"* Not only will a cultural change need to occur, but 4-H professionals will need to strengthen their intercultural competence and have "reaching new audiences" explicitly documented in their position expectations. For example, in a conversation with the Missouri 4-H state program leader, she shared that Missouri 4-H professionals have the expectation to devote 50% of their duties to pre-existing programs, 25% to building community relationships and sustainable programs with new audiences, and the remaining 25% spent in career readiness and natural resources education. Missouri 4-H has also revised its annual evaluation process of 4-H professionals to focus on program growth and not just the maintenance of existing programming. Similarly, hiring new 4-H professionals creates opportunities to reframe work metrics from maintaining existing programs to growing the program to reaching new youth. In either case –

adapting metrics for existing staff or hiring new staff – coupled with support from supervisors, a network of similarly focused professionals, and an intentional plan to infuse the lessons learned across the system may lead to more sustainable efforts to support expanding the 4-H program to new audiences.

Latino Volunteerism in 4-H: Addressing the 4-H Community Club Legacy

In 4-H community clubs, adults serve as volunteers to teach youth, complete administrative tasks, plan events, and serve as resource leaders. The functioning of clubs requires a long-term commitment from volunteers with corresponding heavy administrative and leadership support at the 4-H state and county levels. The legacy of community clubs has made them appear to many as the most "authentic" way to participate in 4-H. A common anecdote we hear from long-tenured 4-H volunteers in community clubs is that participation in the 4-H community club experience is the "real 4-H experience." This sentiment devalues other ways youth might experience 4-H, even though 4-H community club participation is no longer the most prevalent method for young people to be reached by 4-H programs. The number of youths attending community clubs has declined in the last few decades. On average, youth enrollment in 4-H community clubs comprises 20% of total 4-H enrollment (with school enrichment at 48% and short-term and day camps at 28% of total 4-H enrollment; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018). We are at a point where 4-H could be at risk of becoming irrelevant for the new U.S. population if community clubs are promoted as the only option for involvement.

Furthermore, the complex culture and deeply-rooted traditions of the 4-H community club structure can make it difficult for newcomers (particularly those from non-mainstream American culture) to feel like they belong. Participation in 4-H needs to focus equally on creating a welcoming environment and honoring and embracing different cultures, which are open to new and different experiences and opportunities. We need to eliminate the thinking that experiences outside the 4-H community club are "not a 4-H thing" and therefore have no place in the program. Additionally, 4-H community club leaders must intentionally prepare for and enact culturally relevant practices to welcome and embrace Latino youth and adults. Care and preparation of building relationships will be essential for sustained involvement, ensuring high-quality experiences, and achieving high levels of youth development outcomes. The long-term goal is not to build separate culturally relevant clubs but to strategically identify and modify barriers to ensure Latinos are fully engaging in 4-H community club programs to create a space for belonging and full engagement.

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Acknowledgments

Appendix

Interview Protocol for UC 4-H Latino Initiative Volunteers

1. Tell us your name, how you got involved in 4-H, and what you do in 4-H.
2. Describe a typical 4-H meeting. Who is there? What is your role? What happens?
3. Thinking about a typical 4-H meeting, what do you do that helps children participate in the activities? What works well? What have you observed that does not work well? How did you determine if the youth members understood the activity?
4. What do you hope to see children doing in a 4-H meeting? What do you do to help them do this?
5. What do you think children learn in 4-H? How did you know if members were learning?
6. What was your favorite part of 4-H?
7. What would you change about 4-H?
8. Describe how parents are usually involved in 4-H.
9. What helped you prepare to be involved with 4-H?
10. What additional support or training would have been helpful to you in 4-H?
11. Do you feel you have learned anything because of 4-H? If so, what?
12. If you went back in time and started 4-H over again, what advice would you give yourself?
13. Do you have anything else to add?