Getting Them in the Door: Strategies for Recruiting Latinos to Family Life Education Programs

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Abstract: Extension has long been successful at recruiting and serving diverse audiences, and with the rapid growth of Latino families across the United States, many Extension professionals are discovering an increased need to recruit and serve Latinos. This article shares successful recruitment strategies incorporated in a project that recruited low-income Latino parents of young children. Strategies included 1.) Knowing your audience and gaining a strong understanding of the Latino culture, 2.) Strengthening relationships with organizations already serving Latino families, and 3.) Building relationships within the Latino community.

Introduction

The essence of Extension's mission is to take research and resources into the community. In order to get the research and resources to the people, Extension uses a variety of recruitment efforts. Sometimes those efforts work great for the masses, but there are times when recruitment needs to be tailored to the intended audience. This article describes specific strategies for serving Latino audiences.

The Connecting for Children project was designed to provide relationship education to families in Mid-Missouri. Although the Latino population accounts for only 3% of Missouri families (US Census, 2010), Latinos accounted for 40% of families served in this project. The three strategies used to target Latino parents were: increasing cultural competence of staff, developing relationships with community partners

already serving Latino audiences, and building relationships with the Latino community.

Recruitment Strategies

1. Increase Cultural Competence

It is common to make reference to Hispanics or Latinos as a group because there are some strong common traits among them. Culture and its values, customs, and ethnicity shape how an individual views the world, handles problems, and relates to others. However, Latinos are heterogeneous individuals whose countries of origin, migration patterns, socioeconomic profiles, and physical characteristics vary.

Working with Latino families requires an understanding of different worldviews that affect how individuals communicate and interact with professionals. One of the most important characteristics of the Latino population is maintenance of the Spanish language. About 28 million (80%) Latinos over age 5 residing in the United States reported speaking Spanish at home, and more than half of the total population reported speaking fluent English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The data show a strong desire to maintain the Spanish language while increasing proficiency in English. Based on this, the program was culturally adapted, the materials were translated, and the program was implemented in Spanish.

Many Latinos have a collective worldview and a strong identification and attachment to nuclear and extended family (Skogrand, Hatch, & Singh, 2005). Loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among family members are considered to be important cultural attributes. The concept of *familsmo* involves an obligation of the family to share responsibility in rearing children, providing financial and emotional support, and decision-making. The value of the family has remained strong across generations and regardless of time lived in the United States (Contreras, Mangelsdorf, Rhodes, Diener, & Brunson, 1999; Rambaut & Portes, 2001); Viramontez & Kawamoto, 2003). The value of *familismo* guided the selection of activities and arrangements for the program.

Simpatía is highly appreciated among many Latinos and emphasizes a pleasant demeanor aimed at reducing conflict and promoting agreement. Being *simpático* (good-natured and pleasant) is also related to valuing warm, friendly, interpersonal relationships (Antshel, 2002; Levine & Padilla, 1980). This cultural trait has important implications for recruitment and delivery of programs. A bilingual recruiter/trainer who was friendly and communicated with warmth was instrumental in building a relationship with participants.

2. Build Relationships with Existing Service Providers

One important way to reach participants is to create partnerships with established programs and organizations that serve the Latino community. In this case, a close relationship with the local health department was developed; 80% of the couples recruited in year 1 came from this partnership. The partnerships was also useful in consolidating resources that were helpful to the families, allowing the program to offer education on a specific topic as well as connect families to a variety of resources and information. Such wrap-around approaches were beneficial for both organizations and the families being served.

3. Build Relationships with the Latino Community

Developing rapport with participants was vital to recruitment. In order to build those relationships, the project hired a bi-lingual educator with strong connections with the Latino community. Hiring staff who used knowledge of the culture and the community was the most important strategy employed. The educator took time to socialize and develop relationships, which fostered continued participation and interest in the

program. In general, as people began to know each other, they were more likely to develop trust and feel a sense of ownership to the program. Program staff learned to:

- Be Involved. In order to familiarize families with the program and to tie with the trusted relationship with service providers, the project staff attended monthly meetings for over a year and presented at programs conducted by service providers. As a result, relationships were already built. When the program launched, there was a substantial list of families interested in participating.

- Be Available. Project staff followed up with families to answer questions and to recruit through phone calls, at community events, and at the local health department. Many Latino families were not available during regular business hours to inquire about program efforts, so staff was available after hours to talk with families. Lunches-breaks and between the hours of 6 and 9 PM were the best times to reach many families.

Results

Within 6 months, 58 Latino couples were recruited and completed the program. Latino recruitment efforts accounted for 40% of all couples (English- and Spanish-speaking) recruited for the project. The time invested in building rapport with the target audience made a real contribution and helped to change an unfamiliar relationship into one that was culturally recognizable. As a result, Latino families were not only provided an educational opportunity, they became partners for future programming efforts.

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