

10-1-2003

Target-Audience-Specific Networking Groups: Could They Be Helpful in Your Work?

Debra Minar Driscoll

Oregon State Extension Service, debra.driscoll@oregonstate.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Driscoll, D. M. (2003). Target-Audience-Specific Networking Groups: Could They Be Helpful in Your Work?. *The Journal of Extension*, 41(5), Article 25. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol41/iss5/25>

This Tools of the Trade is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.



October 2003 // Volume 41 // Number 5 // Tools of the Trade // 5TOT8



Target-Audience-Specific Networking Groups: Could They Be Helpful in Your Work?

Abstract

Networking groups can assist in connecting service providers with their intended audiences. This article compares and contrasts three groups in Oregon that focus on the needs of Latino families. Results of a survey conducted in a local group are shared, and benefits of joining or starting a networking group are discussed.

Debra Minar Driscoll

Extension Family and Community Education Faculty
Oregon State University Extension Service
Dallas, Oregon
Internet Address: debra.driscoll@oregonstate.edu

Those of us who are putting our efforts into outreach to underserved audiences can find plenty of challenges in connecting the people to be served with the educational programming that could benefit them. Many communities have networking groups designed to assist in connecting services providers with their intended audiences.

In western Oregon, a focus of many networking groups is outreach to migrant and resident Latino families. This article compares and contrasts three of these groups. It also shares the results of a survey that was conducted with members of a local group.

The Groups

Group A

Group A was initially formed to help service providers assist migrant workers who had come to the area when cold weather delayed the strawberry crop, making many workers temporarily unable to provide for their basic needs. This group meets monthly and is facilitated by the director of a food bank network.

The facilitator and an informal committee choose speakers for each meeting. Meetings begin with the guest speaker presentation, followed by sharing of current programs or issues by everyone present. Meetings last up to 2 hours, and attendance is normally 20 to 30 persons.

Anyone in the community may attend meetings at any time. Minutes and agendas are mailed to those on the sign-in list. Its geographic area is the northern part of a large agricultural county.

Group B

Group B was formed about 10 years ago as a way to advocate for equal access to services for Latino families. In the past year, its structure has changed. What was an informal group is now one with an executive committee, officers, bylaws, and council member registration forms. The reason for this change was to garner a greater commitment from members to work actively on the group's goals.

The group meets monthly and is planning a training event for social service workers. Meetings last 3 hours and are divided into a networking segment and a council meeting, where the emphasis is on goal setting and action. Eight to 15 participants attend. Its geographic base is from three counties.

Meetings are held in the state capital, and as a result there is a greater representation of state agency staff. The secretary of the group sends meeting notices via electronic mail. Speakers are part of the program quarterly, and are selected by the executive council, which meets monthly.

Group C

Group C was formed as a result of a lawsuit judgment against the state child welfare agency asserting that seven counties in the state were not providing Latino families equal access to services. Although no longer legally required, this countywide group meets monthly and has evolved over the past 10 years from one focused on providing a community cultural event and working toward expansion of needed services, to a networking group with monthly speakers and rotating facilitators and recorders. It has also gained a reputation in the county as a place for new staff to gather ideas on ways to reach Latino audiences.

Attendance is open to anyone, and varies from 10 to 20 participants each month. Meetings last from 1 to 2 hours. Monthly speakers are selected during a discussion at each meeting, and volunteers contact the speakers. Minutes and agendas are e-mailed to all who have electronic access and mailed to those who do not. The geographic base is one county.

Similarities and Differences

All three groups

- Have similar missions,
- Meet within the geographic communities,
- Have established sound reputations,
- Are made up of agency professionals, and
- Are governed by an executive committee or have identified leadership.

The key difference among them is the expected level of participation.

Participants in Group A

- Attend meetings,
- Listen, and
- Observe.

Participants in Group B

- Can attend networking with no additional expectations, or
- Can become council members, who are expected to participate in decision making and assume committee roles.

Participants in Group C

- Are expected to take part in problem solving, and
- Help with meeting roles and arrange for speakers.

Survey Conducted with Group C in 2002

What are service providers looking for when they attend networking groups? With the budget crunch that Oregon and other states are facing, why would someone who is already overloaded with work want to attend yet another meeting? To find out more about the thinking of the participants in Group C, a four-page written survey instrument was developed by a subcommittee. Surveys were sent in June of 2002 to 52 people who had attended at least two meetings over the previous 3 years. Twenty-three surveys were returned by early August, for a 48% rate of return.

After some preliminary questions regarding the mission statement, the survey asked, "Why do you attend, or why did you attend the [Group C] meetings? Check all that apply." Respondents were also asked to place an asterisk by the one or two most important reasons for attendance. Table 1 summarizes the responses.

Table 1.
Survey Responses

Statement	Number of Votes (Ranking)
to network with other agencies and organizations	17 (1)
to help Hispanic/Latino families connect to resources	16 (2)

to improve or enhance my work in the community	15 (3)
to accomplish the goals of the group	12 (4)
was asked by my supervisor to attend	11 (5)
to hear the presenters	10 (6 - tie)
to find collaborative partners for projects or programs	10 (6 - tie)
to help Hispanic/Latino families learn useful information	9 (7)
to accomplish my professional goals	8 (8)
attendance is/was a requirement of my job	5 (9)
don't know or not sure	0 (10 - tie)
other, please specify ____	0 (10 - tie)

A review of the three most frequently selected responses shows that participants value networking opportunities, are committed to helping the target audience, and seek to improve their effectiveness in the community. Networking and helping families connect to resources, with 11 responses each, were selected as the most important reasons to attend the meetings.

A question later in the survey asked: "What is your level of interest and time commitment available for the Council? Please choose as many as apply." Table 2 presents those results.

Table 2.
Respondents Interest Level and Available Time

Statement	Number of Votes (Ranking)
attend and participate in meetings	15 (1)
participate in a work group or subcommittee of interest to me	10 (2)
report back information to my agency or organization	9 (3)
participate in putting on a major outreach event for the community	7 (4)
serve as facilitator, record minutes, or bring refreshments once or twice a year	5 (5 - tie)
receive mailings only	5 (5 - tie)
no involvement at this time	4 (6)

The majority of respondents could commit to attending and participating in meetings. Going beyond that level of commitment into subcommittee work was a little more tentative. After presenting the results of this survey at a Group C meeting, the group voted to focus the meetings on networking and drop their struggling effort of continuing to sponsor a community event.

Conclusions

Could target-audience-specific networking groups enhance your work in the local community? Effective networking groups can take many forms. I suggest jumping in with both feet and making a commitment to attend meetings for 3 months before you decide whether or not it is worth your time. You will know it's a good match if you feel comfortable in the group and feel that your needs are being met.

What if there are no existing groups, but the need for one is evident in your community? Find a few partner agencies, and start one. Be sure to consider the time limitations of those invited, and work together to set clear goals. If you are the designated coordinator, take the time to set up an electronic mail group for sending announcements of meetings. Delegate as much of the detail work as possible to build group ownership and lighten your load.

Participation in networking groups can help you:

- Increase your knowledge about the audience;
- Assess the needs of the target audience;
- Increase service providers' knowledge of Extension programming;
- Find agency personnel with goals similar to yours;
- Develop partnerships with other groups and agencies to extend services;
- Gain access to audiences served by other agencies; and
- Develop collaborative programming efforts and events.

My time spent attending networking meetings has been richly rewarded with new ideas for programming and methodology. I found new partners who gave me access to audiences I could never have reached on my own.

Copyright by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, joe-ed@joe.org.

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)