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## Cultural Competency in USU Extension: Impact of Professional Development for Latino Outreach Programs

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## **Cultural Competency in USU Extension: Impact of Professional Development for Latino Outreach Programs**

*Celina Wille & Lendel Narine*

### **Abstract**

*In response to the growing Latino population in Utah, USU Extension faculty participated in trainings to build their cultural competency and engage with Latino audiences. The professional development series were attended by 186 Extension professionals. A 2021 follow-up study reported that 52% of respondents who participated in the training are currently engaging in Latino outreach programs.*

### **Introduction**

In 2020, the Latino population reached 62 million, representing nearly one-in-five people in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2021). Latinos are the largest minority in Utah, comprising 14% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). As an underserved group, they have poorer outcomes in several major areas. For example, they have less access to health services (Utah Department of Health Office of Health Disparities, 2016), higher rates of poverty, and poorer youth academic achievement (Utah Foundation, 2021) compared to other racial and ethnic groups in Utah. While USU Extension provides a wide range of educational programs to address issues such as health and wellness, personal financial management, and positive youth development, Latino participation in Extension programs is low compared to other racial groups (Wille & Garcia, 2017).

Research suggests that low participation may be due to the lack of culturally relevant programming (Diaz et al., 2021). To better meet the needs of the Latino population in Utah, Extension programs need to reflect the beliefs, values and traditions of Latinos to successfully engage with them, especially first- and second-generation Latinos. Hobbs (2004) indicated a culturally responsive approach to programming can lead to increase participation from diverse groups in non-formal education. Therefore, Extension educators must become culturally competent to provide responsive and effective programming that addresses the needs of the Latino population (Guion & Brown, 2010) to more effectively reach out to this diverse and continuously growing population in Utah.

### **Response and Target Audience**

A professional development series focusing on Latino Cultural Competency was implemented in 2017 for USU Extension professionals. The first and second sessions in the series were offered in the Fall of 2017. The first session in 2017 targeted Extension faculty and staff working in counties with a Latino population of 8% or higher. The second session targeted 4-H and youth development professionals. The third session, was offered in 2018 to all other Extension faculty and staff and new hires. Finally, an additional two separate half-day workshops were offered in 2019 and customized for nutrition education outreach for the Create Better Health and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program teams at USU Extension. All workshops were

facilitated by Extension educators with expertise in diversity and cultural competency. A total of 186 USU Extension professionals were trained between 2017 and 2019 ( $n = 186$ ).

During the workshops, participants, (a) completed a personal and institutional self-assessment using a questionnaire to determine their current cultural competence level and their institution; (b) attended presentations on cultural values and best practices; (c) carried out community mapping activities to assess resources and evaluate current knowledge of their Latino communities; (d) completed a SWOT [Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats assessments] group activity; (e) participated in a World Café activity to compile group brainstorming on Latino outreach ideas, and (f) completed a workshop evaluation. The workshops for 4-H and youth development professionals and for the nutrition education teams were tailored to focus on subgroups of Latino culture.

*Figure 1: Latino Cultural Competency Workshops at USU Extension*



## Outcomes and Impact

Evaluation data were gathered using exit surveys at the end of each workshop. The desired short-term outcome of the series was to increase the cultural competency of Extension professionals and equip them with the knowledge and skills to deliver non-formal programs to Latino populations in Utah. In 2017, a total of 52 participants completed the first Cultural Competency workshop in Davis county ( $n = 52$ ). Overall, participants rated the workshop as “very good.” Feedback on the value of the workshop was also gathered using one open-ended question. One participant stated “Awesome workshop, I learned so much. I am completely new to any of this so it was a real eye opener.” Another said, “Good discussions with others in my county about what we can do to increase Hispanic participation.” Evaluation data were also gathered at the end of another Cultural Competency workshop for Extension professionals in 2019. Figure 2 summarizes survey respondents’ perceptions towards the 2019 workshop ( $n = 32$ ).

Figure 2: Evaluation Results from the 2019 Cultural Competency workshop



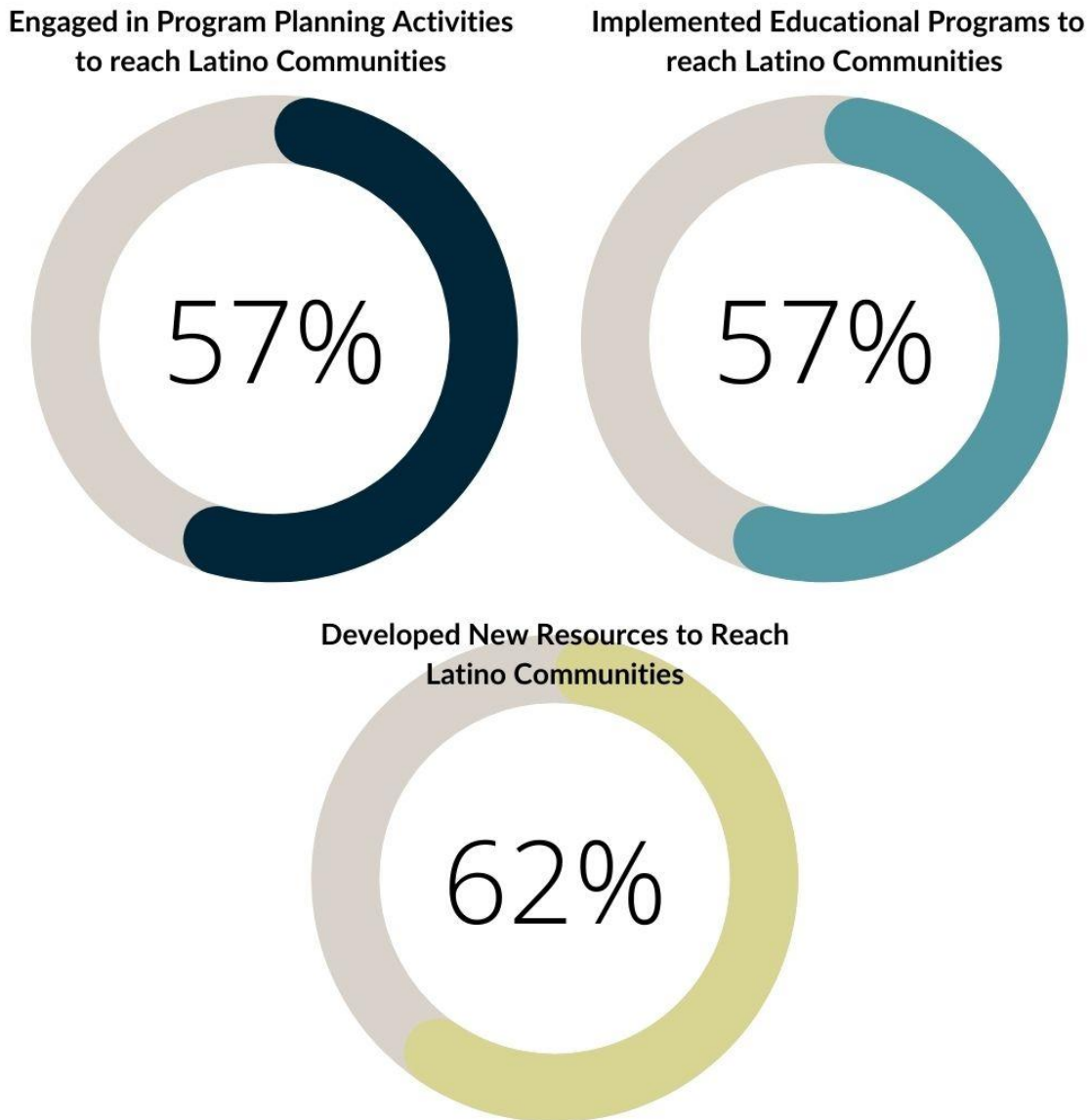
Evaluation results from the 2017 session targeting 4-H and youth development Extension professionals indicated 78% of participants were confident in their ability to integrate Latino outreach strategies in their 4-H programs ( $n = 17$ ). One participant stated “I would really like a follow-up webinar session. Love the toolkit that was provided at the training.” In addition, workshops tailored to the Create Better Health and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program teams in 2019 were well-attended; 76 Extension staff and nutrition paraprofessionals responsible for nutrition education programs participated in two half-day Cultural Competency sessions. Figure 3 summarizes responses from Create Better Health training ( $n = 39$ )

Figure 3: Evaluation Results of the Create Better Health workshop



In 2021, follow-up evaluation data was gathered via a Qualtrics survey from all participants who attended at least one of the Latino Cultural Competency sessions. It assessed the extent to which the Latino Cultural Competency series motivated Extension faculty to plan and implement programs to reach Latino audiences. Figure 4 illustrates participant's responses ( $n = 57$ ). Results show about 52% of Extension professionals who attended a workshop have engaged in some form of Latino programming. In addition, over half the number of participants in the series were engaged in program planning activities, implemented educational programs, or developed resources for Latino audiences.

Figure 4: Latino Programming at USU Extension in 2021



### Next Steps

Developing Latino cultural competency through professional development is an effective strategy for building the capacity of Extension faculty to engage with Latino audiences. To keep momentum, it is important that efforts to build cultural competency become integrated into regular onboarding of new Extension faculty, as our sessions show that trainings can increase the knowledge and skills needed for program planning, implementing educational programs and

developing resources for Latino audiences. USU Extension plans to provide training to newly hired 4-H program coordinators on cultural competency. Furthermore, implementing other valid strategies (e.g., diverse hiring from within the target audience, specialized training, and funding support), can further propel long-term growth and expansion of Extension programs in the Latino community. To effectively meet a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, Extension must continue to build the cultural competence of employees for working with Latinos, the fastest growing diverse population across the state. They should also prepare for reaching other diverse, emerging audiences.

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