

Engaging Latino Communities from the Ground Up: Three Tools

Abstract

California's 4-H Youth Development Program has adopted an asset-based community development approach to extending programming with Latino youths and families. This approach entails learning and relationship building with local Latino communities and building on untapped existing resources, such as Latino-serving organizations and networks. Here we present three tools developed to further the effort.

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Introduction

Meeting the 4-H mission of serving all young people well requires building strong relationships with the diversity of U.S. youths and communities. From 1980 to 2013, the Latino population under 18 years old grew more than 300%; moreover, Latino children and youths are more likely to experience economic poverty and less likely to enroll in extracurricular activities and college than their peers of other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Pew Research Center, 2015). These statistics underscore the importance of Latino community outreach, as increasing Latino 4-H participation holds promise to both help address Latino youths' needs and help the nation benefit from Latino community resources (Jones, LaVergne, Elbert, Larke, & Larke, 2013). However, few 4-H statewide programs have successfully achieved this objective.

To help strengthen engagement of Latino youths, our research team, in association with California's 4-H Youth Development Program, has focused on identifying the characteristics of successful Latino-serving youth

development programs. We have adopted an asset-based community development approach, which foregrounds the importance of learning and relationship building with local Latino communities and capitalizing on untapped existing resources, such as Latino-serving organizations and networks.

To launch this effort, we had to begin learning about the formal and informal social and institutional landscape of the localities where we aimed to work. We developed a systematic approach to doing so that employed several tools.

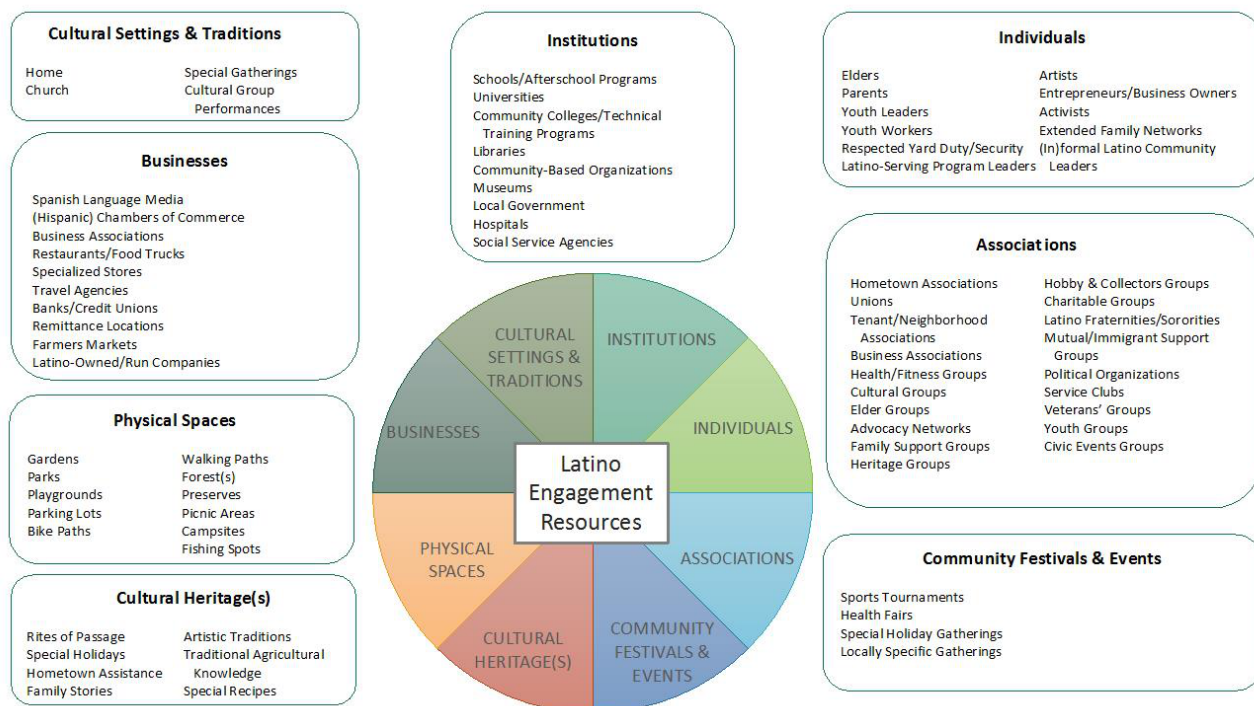
Tools

Three key tools we used were a Latino engagement resource chart, a Latino youth development resource log, and a key informant interview protocol.

Latino Engagement Resource Chart

We began assessing the ecosystem of Latino populations and places in the target region by using the Latino engagement resource chart. This chart identifies categories of widespread resources, such as cultural settings and traditions, businesses, physical spaces, cultural heritage(s), institutions, individuals, associations, and community festivals and events. Identifying these assets supported 4-H Youth Development Program staff in their learning and outreach efforts. The resource chart encouraged staff to consider multiple ways that Latinos are engaged in the region and provided pathways for connecting with the local Latino population.

Figure 1.
Latino Engagement Resource Chart



We began filling in the chart for specific localities by brainstorming in teams that included area 4-H Youth Development Program advisors and Latino staff with local connections. At the local level, researchers

completed the charts with information gathered from community partners.

Latino Youth Development Resource Log

We also were interested in identifying existing local settings already supporting Latino youth development. Staff used online databases of nonprofit organizations and service providers, as well as individual program websites, to research and record information about various organizations. They then recorded applicable information on Latino youth development resource logs (Figure 2).

Figure 2.
Latino Youth Development Resource Log Template

	Org 1	Org 2
Organization/Program Background		
Organization name		
Contact name		
Address		
Email, website, phone		
Mission		
Core activities		
Program duration		
# staff (paid, volunteer)		
# youths served annually		
Staff race/ethnicity		
Participant race/ethnicity		
Search Process		
Informant (e.g., 211, Guidestar, program website, interview, etc.)		
Associated keywords (if found in online database)		
Criteria Scoring (1 = low 2 = some 3 = high)		
Incorporates extended/emerging understandings of positive youth development that reflect Latin@ and immigrant youth experience		
Contains with physiological and social effects of discrimination		
Supports positive ethnic identity development		
Responds to economic poverty		
Tailors efforts to the specific experience, resources, needs, and interests of local and		

regional Latin@ youths and families		
AVERAGE SCORE		

After recording pertinent information in the first two sections of the Latino youth development resource log, staff assessed an organization against the set of evidence-based criteria included in the "Criteria Scoring" section of the log (the shaded section of Figure 2). The criteria were derived from a literature review on characteristics of high-quality Latino-serving positive youth development programs (Erbstein & Fabionar, 2014). Organizations were ranked as high (3), medium (2), or low (1) for each criterion. This assessment informed staff about organizations' strengths.

Key Informant Interview Protocol

Next we interviewed individuals, identified through a snowball sampling process, who could offer a broad perspective on area Latino populations and settings supporting Latino youth development. Key informants represented grassroots leadership and advocacy networks, faith-based institutions, community and economic development organizations, elected officials, government employees, community foundations, arts groups, and those working in education programs that integrate science, technology, engineering, and math with the arts.

We designed interview questions (Figure 3) to help us learn about local Latino histories, Latino youth and family challenges and assets, and programs and places viewed as serving Latino youths well.

Figure 3.

Latino Youth Development Key Informant Interview Protocol

1. How would you briefly describe the Latino population, or populations, in _____ County? [Probe: To what extent is the youth population first generation, second generation, multi-generation US residents? What are the sending countries/states/regions? To what extent are immigrant youths undocumented, or from mixed status families? What are some key interests, challenges and resources among local youths and families?]
2. We recognize that excellent supports for young people's growth and development can be offered in many types of places beyond families, such as formal and more informal community-based organizations, school-based programs, community organizing networks, faith-based organizations, mentoring programs through businesses, libraries, etc. How would you describe the types of places that are most actively and effectively engaging this county's Latino youths? Is there someone at these organizations I can contact?
3. When you think about the programs or places here, are there

some that do not currently serve Latino youths well? Please explain. [Probe: What does it mean to not serve Latino youths well? What is your evidence? What is your assessment of their barriers to sustained engagement of Latino youths?]

4. What are the gaps in out-of-school support and resources for Latino youths in this county?
5. Is there anything else you want to tell me to help identify highly successful Latino youth-serving efforts in the county?

Interviews based on the protocol provided important information about the regional Latino population and their interests and resources and extended information recorded on the Latino engagement resource charts and Latino youth development resource logs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our experience to date suggests that Extension agents should employ an asset-based community development approach to learn from and develop relationships with local Latino communities and Latino-serving organizations and networks. By completing the Latino engagement resource chart, we extended our thinking about potential resources for connecting with local Latino communities beyond nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, cultural events, and businesses to include cultural associations and particular community settings. Information gathered from key informant interviews enhanced our engagement with the diversity of Latino communities, providing additional insights into the active role of Latino governmental organizations as well as indigenous Mexican associations. This relational interaction also extended our network of resources for learning about effective practices for engaging Latino youths and collaborating on program development, implementation, and outreach.

Using the Latino engagement resource chart, Latino youth development resource log, and key informant interview protocol tools can facilitate Extension agents' engagement with new partners and strengthen relationships with existing ones to extend and enhance programming. A similar community development approach might also be useful in outreach to other populations that are underserved by 4-H youth development programs.

Acknowledgment

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