

HELPING YOUTH **THRIVE**

HELPING YOUTH THRIVE THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS



PLWG
PROGRAM LEADERS
WORKING GROUP



FACT SHEET
11/12

4-H Program Leaders Working Group
Access, Equity and Belonging Committee

Latinx Youth

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Why an Equity Lens?

4-H has made a bold commitment to youth across the United States: to reflect the population demographics, vulnerable populations, diverse needs, and social conditions of the country (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017). 4-H has affirmed that we will help close the opportunity gap for marginalized youth and communities to fully thrive (Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, 4-H, 2019; National 4-H Council, 2020). Making good on these promises requires that all those working with youth in 4-H critically analyze current programs and deliver those programs through an equity lens. Administrators, professionals, volunteers, and stakeholders have a responsibility to be aware of and confront the disparities that exist within 4-H programs and in society. Doing so is critical because those who aim to develop youth without acknowledgment of and response to a young person's possible societal inequities is perpetuating injustice (Fields et al., 2018). The 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold, 2018) describes the process of positive youth development in 4-H. We should explore the 4-H Thriving Model, our national theoretical framework, with the same level of critical review to ensure it guides our work with equity and social justice at the fore.

The 4-H Program Leaders Working Group, Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee (AEBC) has joined with the 4-H Thriving Model Taskforce to ensure this nationally adopted model is explored and utilized through an equity lens. The following fact sheet explores the Thriving Model in relation to Latinx youth.

The term Latinx is used in academic publications and the media, and not necessarily by people in the community. Hispanics is the preferred term among U.S. adults with Latino or Hispanic origin (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). Hispanic is the term used by the U.S. Census Bureau and includes people of Spanish origin or descent who designate themselves as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, as well as those who self-identify as Mexican-American, Cuban American, and the like (Spradlin & Parsons, 2008).

The term Latinx will be used in this fact sheet interchangeably with Hispanics to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Mexican, Central and South American descent populations who live in the U.S. The term Latinx dismantles the default masculine of romance languages and is gender inclusive and neutral. The Latinx population is a diverse group of people with different countries of origin, languages, socioeconomic statuses, migration stories and educational levels.

The vast diversity of Latinx youth served by Cooperative Extension (Extension) professionals is robust with each sending country or immigrant generation having distinct characteristics that can empower or hinder a program's success. The diversity of cultures within Latinx communities requires Extension professionals to first familiarize themselves with the unique culture, social ecosystem, and history of the cultural group they plan to work with in order to ensure a level of success. An equity lens will allow an Extension practitioner to understand the specific conditions they must consider when planning to program with Latinx communities.

Social Conditions of Youth Population

Latinx youth are the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S. and comprise 25.7% of the total U.S. youth population (U.S. Census, 2020). In California and Texas, Hispanic children comprise the largest ethnic group, and the majority of children are of Mexican descent. The most diverse Hispanic children population is in the Northeast—Maine, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island, Florida and Virginia. In Florida, Latinx children trace their origins to Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. In the West, Midwest and Southern regions of the U.S. the majority of Hispanic children are of Central American and Mexican descent (Slowey, 2017). Latinx youth face many-layered, multi-faceted conditions that impact their development and their participation in activities.

Positive Social Conditions:

- Spanish is the primary language among first generation Latinx youth and/or parents. Many households are bilingual, and Spanglish, a blending of the two languages, is common (Lopez, Krogstad & Flores, 2018).
- Latinx culture places family at the center for creating strong bonds to support all members. Strong families are most vibrant for immigrant children, declining in second and third generations (Koss-Chioino & Vargas, 1999).
- A majority of Latinx youth (58 percent) live in two parent households (Lopez, Krogstad & Flores, 2018).
- Often, Latinx youth serve as cultural brokers and translators for their parents (Coll et al., 2009).
- Dietary and health habits are stronger among immigrant families compared to White families, or second or later Latinx generations (Van Hook et al., 2018).
- Latinx adolescents demonstrate a high level of obligation to the family and often work while attending high school or take care of siblings on a daily basis (Coll et al., 2009).
- High school and college attendance rates have increased for Latinx youth over the past decade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).
- Latinx LGBTQ+ youth who have supportive and accepting families are more likely to experience positive health outcomes such as greater self-esteem and resilience; a lowered risk of depression, distress and feelings of hopelessness; and a reduced risk of substance use (Human Rights Commission, 2018).
- Latinx population continues to grow in communities. The demand for Latinx programming is growing as well as funding for programming.
- Latinx youth have a rich verbal folklore including poems, sayings, chants, riddles, rhymes, jingles, and proverbs (*dichos*) as a way to acknowledge lessons learned from elders (Koss-Chioino & Vargas, 1999).

Challenging Social Conditions:

Variations in well-being exist among Latinx children with different ethnic or national origins, and residence in regions of the United States (Krogstad & Bustamante, 2021; Mather & Foxen, 2016).

- The majority of Latinx youth (62%) live in low-income families (Krogstad & Bustamante, 2021).
- Sixty four percent of Latinx youth live with mothers who graduated from high school, compared with 90% White youth (Mather & Foxen, 2016).
- Latinx youth lag behind White and Black children in access to health insurance (Ollove, 2021)
- Latinx children face higher risks of childhood obesity. However, Southeastern states have much lower rates of childhood obesity than states in the Southwest, which have more third-generation youth (Mather & Foxen, 2016).
- Latinx youth in the Northeast region of the U.S. are more likely to live in single-parent families compared to those living in other parts of the country (Mather & Foxen, 2016).
- Immigrant youth in Southeast states tend to have worse educational and economic outcomes than youth whose families have lived in this region for several generations in the same region (Mather & Foxen, 2016).
- Latinx LGBTQ youth whose families are not supportive of various gender identities or gender expression live in fear of rejection, and face a variety of stressors such as harassment, peer rejection, bullying and isolation – that have a major impact on their overall well-being (Human Rights Commission, 2018).
- Latinx youth are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness than non-Latinx youth (33% of 18-25 year-olds). However, only 19% of youth served by federally funded runaway and homeless youth programs in 2014 were Latinx (Gibbard Kline, 2018).

Competencies Needed to Engage Youth Population

It is critical for youth development professionals to work towards the development of skills and knowledge that allows programs to benefit all youth. The following skills were adapted from the 4-H Professional, Research, Knowledge and Competencies (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017).

Ideally, a bilingual/multilingual, bicultural/multicultural professional is hired to engage with Latinx youth and families (e.g., Spanish, Mixteco and other indigenous languages). Evidence illustrates the importance of staff having a similar or shared experience with youth (Erbstein & Fabionar, 2018; Moncloa et al, 2019). In order to effectively engage Latinx youth, professionals are encouraged to develop or strengthen the following competencies:

- Understand the history of discrimination, racism, and racial trauma on Latinx communities and its impact on them.
- Recognize the cultural, technological, and social influences amongst various youth within the Latinx community.
- Understand LGBTQ youths' unique experiences of racial and ethnocultural oppression.
- Affirm language, cultural and family identity and structure.
- Build relationships of trust, safety, and mutual respect with different individuals and groups; Latinx youth and families prefer to work in groups rather than individually.
- Take the time to meet parents in person and create a relationship of trust.
- Promote acceptance of and respect for diversity.
- Ensure that any communication/information shared is communicated in a way that meets the cultural, language and literacy levels required for full understanding.
- Form programmatic partnerships across intercultural differences and involve community cultural organizations and groups.

Belonging and Participation in 4-H

Fostering a sense of belonging for Latinx youth includes using an asset-based approach that embodies culturally-relevant practices and integrates an extended understandings of youth development to support youth's ethnic identity, contend with physiological and social effects of discrimination, respond to economic poverty, and act upon the diversity of local and regional Latinx experiences (Erbstein & Fabionar, 2019).

An asset-based approach includes engaging youth and families in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs. It includes using culturally responsive teaching and honoring the many attributes, values, and qualities Latinx youth and families possess. Culturally responsive teaching [is] "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students" (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

During programming, Extension professionals can support youth by drawing from their strengths and capacities to develop the skills, competencies, and confidence to be active learners, independent and critical thinkers, and contributory members of their learning community. The following are additional evidence-based strategies to foster a sense of belonging for Latinx youth:

- Build on community partnerships as a way to engage Latinx families and to identify a place that is safe and accessible to all.
- Engage youth and families using language that is relevant to them.
- Center programs and initiatives on Latinx youth and their other identities. As an example Latinx LGBTQ+ youth are reported to live in fear of rejection, and face a variety of stressors such as harassment, peer

rejection, bullying and isolation. Develop programs and problem solving from youth's perspective and consider them first in every potential solution.

- Invite families to program meetings and create spaces for social interactions amongst families.
- At the first meeting/orientation of the program ask participants these questions: "What motivated you to attend today? What would you like to learn or gain from this program?"
- Make every effort to meet and get to know parents. Have the parents get to know adult volunteers and agents. Be seen in the community as someone who supports and advocates Latinx audiences.
- Encourage multilingual meetings. Include a social component in program agendas, where families share cultural aspects if desired.
- Build on their strengths such as being bicultural, bilingual, and resilient to offer opportunities for leadership roles.
- Create safe spaces for Latinx youth to talk about issues they experience in their communities such as poverty, violence, immigration, discrimination, etc. This can be in one on one conversations, group conversations, or workshops (Moncloa et al, 2021).
- Provide written material for parents and volunteers in multiple languages to reduce language barriers. Rely on community partners to translate materials.
- Invite speakers and program extenders who have a similar lived experience and culture of participating youth.
- Coordinate events with community partners such as family nights that involve parents in youths' 4-H culture. That will create trust and foster a family community in your 4-H program.
- Include opportunities for positive ethnic identity and healing as Latinx youth thrive in these environments.
- Invite cultural brokers to facilitate access, and build trust with Latinx community programs, youth and families. Consider engaging community members who may not be able to teach but will be willing to help in youth activities by collaborating with the program.

Latinx youth come from varied socio-economic, cultural, and demographic backgrounds. Due to the intersectionality of this population, 4-H professionals should be aware and implement strategies that acknowledge the whole child, including their gender identification, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, etc. For further information and appropriate strategies, please refer to the other AEBC Youth Fact Sheets for the cultural, LGBTQ+, and racial demographics as well as the socio-economic backgrounds of Latinx youth the 4-H professional is working with.

Community Relationships and Partners

Engage in intentional community building efforts with Latinx families, communities and Latinx youth-serving organizations (Moncloa et al, 2019; Lopez, 2017; Torres, et al, 2016). Establishing strong relationships first will facilitate the integration of Latinx families into 4-H and youth programs.

- Get to know the Latinx youth and family population, their histories and current stories preferably through informal personal conversations. Use asset-based community mapping, an organizational log and key informant interviews as tools to understand the Latinx community (Erbstein et al., 2017). Conduct theme focused community listening sessions to better understand the Latinx experience (Bagley & Quintino-Aranda, 2020).
- Participate in community events sponsored by Latinx youth-serving organizations, or events that target this population. Representation of 4-H and Extension, and showing up to events, gatherings and meetings is important to strengthen 4-H's reputation in the Latinx community.
- Extend invitations to Latinx youth-serving organizations or Latinx community leaders to attend events 4-H is organizing. Personal invitations are the most effective. It is important to establish authentic relationships with community leaders, professionals working with Latinx, and community organizers advocating for Latinx disparities/risk factors (Moncloa et al, 2019; Horrillo et al, 2017).

- Create a Latinx inclusion task force composed of Latinx youth, parents, and Latinx professionals from youth-serving organizations, businesses, and foundations.
- Collaborate with LGBTQ+ youth-serving organizations to address the anti-LGBTQ attitudes, racism and other systems of oppression that present undue challenges to Latinx LGBTQ youth's well-being.

Organizations that work with Latinx youth and families:

- State and county health departments
- Local churches and other religious institutions
- Community centers in Latinx populated areas
- Latinx restaurants, stores, and art centers
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- School districts and after school programs
- Community coalitions and committees that serve Latinx. e.g. Latino Leadership Programs, Latino networks
- Nonprofits in the area of immigration, housing, healthcare, transportation, and education
- City and county departments
- Local universities, community college, and vocational colleges
- Spanish speaking media, newspapers, and radio evaluation
- New City Kids

Evaluation

Evaluations are influenced by values, context and culture. In the implementation of systematic assessments, it is important to question whose values, process, and evaluation outcomes are included to validate a program's success. Context includes the spaces where culture develops. In program evaluations it is important to attend to demographic factors and contextual factors such as Latinx youths' social life, economic and living situation, and power dynamics. These dimensions influence culture. Culturally relevant evaluation is developed collaboratively using a participatory evaluation frame which fully engages stakeholders and includes the epistemologies of Latinx population.

In programs where the funding organization asks for evaluation with a standard measure, ensure it has been or will be validated with Latinx youth. When the need arises to translate it into Spanish, the translation needs to be culturally adapted to ensure information is at the appropriate literacy level, addresses variations in language from country/region of origin, and eliminates gender, racial, or cultural bias. Assess the best method to collect the data. Is the best method using a Google document, Qualtrics form, or paper copies? What resources/tools/material is needed to assist with barriers identified?

To evaluate a program, the first step is to define success from multiple perspectives. Consider the following: What is your purpose in strengthening Latinx inclusion? Or, put in another way, what will your program look like when it is newcomer inclusive? What are the signs of success? A Latinx inclusion task force, composed of Latinx youth, parents, and Latinx professionals from youth-serving organizations, businesses, and foundations, is the best resource for defining success, choosing indicators, and determining ways to measure them. A combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators of success will provide a rich story about the 4-H program's progress and Latinx youth outcomes.

Quantitative inclusion indicators could include the number or percentage of the following:

- Latinx 4-H members
- Latinx participants in 4-H in-school or afterschool programs
- Latinx staff and volunteers and retention

- Latinx county committee members
- Latinx volunteer hours (per month)

Quantitative indicators are usually easier to collect and understand, but they don't always tell the whole story. An evaluation that illustrates the nuances of the Latinx youth and family experience in 4-H may include the following questions:

- How do 4-H youth invite family and friends to activities?
- What kinds of positions do Latinx volunteers hold? Are Latinxs represented in 4-H management and leadership? How do Latinxs participate in decision-making in 4-H?
- From the perception of Latinxs, are there fewer barriers than before to being part of 4-H? What barriers remain and how can they be addressed?
- How do Latinx youth express a sense of belonging and safety in the program?
- How do Latinx believe the 4-H program is as much for them as it is for others?
- What is the reputation of the 4-H program among Latinx community partners? Do partners perceive 4-H staff and volunteers as culturally competent?
- What feedback have Latinx partners provided to 4-H regarding the programs' inclusion strategy and results?

A Latinx culturally responsive outcome measure is designed to acknowledge 'the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum' (Gay, 2000, p. 29). This means that outcome measures can be designed if the curriculum used validates and values youth's cultural characteristics. As an example, asking youth who are Latinx and are indigenous to meet a single set of criteria is introducing cultural bias into the assessment.

Questions to consider:

- What is a desired youth outcome from the perspective of community partners, funders, practitioners, and youth participants?
- Include all of these outcome indicators in the evaluation design and data collection.

Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

- Engage adults who Latinx youth trust to be in the room during data collection.
- Ensure there are enough people (professionals, student assistants, volunteers) helping with data collection who are bi-lingual/multilingual.
- If using a systemwide assessment, read out loud each question or statement to ensure comprehension.
- Engage youth (when developmentally appropriate), program stakeholders, and the Latinx inclusion task force in data analysis.
- Present results to youth, parents, and stakeholders during a cultural and social event or end of program celebration. Engage adolescents in data presentation.

Resources to Work with Latinx youth

- 4-H Latino Youth Outreach: Best Practices Toolkit, <https://4-h.org/professionals/marketing-resources/latinooutreach/>
- UC ANR Latinx Fact Sheets and Practitioner Briefs; <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/Items.aspx?hierId=11400>
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Youth Development web page: <https://dei.extension.org/youth-development/>
- Human Rights Commission's Coming Out: Living Authentically as LGBTQ Latinx Americans <https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-out-living-authentically-as-lgbtq-latinx-americans>

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Authorship

Fe Moncloa

University of California

Guadalupe Castro

Prairie View A & M University

Ricardo Diaz

XPenn Consultants

Veronica Quintino-Aranda

Michigan State University

Latino Advisory Committee