

Developing Programs for Latino Youth

- Learn about your community, the background of the families and who the formal and informal community leaders are. Identify community partners who can assist with your entry into the community.
- Before developing programs, ask the Latino community (adults and youth) what their needs and interests are. Be aware that youth may not be as vocal if asked in a gathering that also includes adults. Find a way to assess youth interests separately. How does your mission, program, address their interest?
- Establish an advisory group for the program made up of Latino community members and others. Call on them regularly to evaluate the program and to make suggestions for needed changes.
- Provide opportunities for youth to be involved in the design and evaluation of programs. Everyone needs to take ownership and feel pride in their participation. Service learning programs work well.
- Target programs specifically to group if possible. This does not mean others may not attend, but the emphasis should be on making the environment reflective of the Latino experience. For instance, at a family activity night play Latino music, offer Latino food, and have staff available who can speak Spanish. Allow time for group interactions.
- Proceed slowly, thoughtfully, and incrementally. Don't attempt too much at one time.
- Build relationships with youth based on respect, acceptance, caring, and trust. Do not be judgmental. Lecture does not work, everyone learns and enjoys when doing. Hands-on interactive activities are always preferred. Take time to interact with group.
- Expect and encourage family involvement. The Latino culture is family focused and activities that involve both parents and children are popular. Even when programming only involves youth, parents want and expect opportunities for learning about what is happening in the program along the way, not just at the beginning and end of a program. Let teachers/leaders know that parents and other family members are always welcome when appropriate.
- Programs must provide an opportunity for active participation. Hands on, Hands on, Hands on!!!!
- Do not assume all programs are transferable. A program designed for Anglo youth won't necessarily work with Latino youth. Monitor and adjust. Usually nature is universal!
- Families and youth respond best to an invitation to participate if it is presented personally. The use of flyers, posters, and announcements yields limited response. A pre-visit to the school or site with a short interactive interpretive program will encourage visitation and prepare group for future trip.
- The importance of having program materials available in Spanish depends on the literacy level of participants in both Spanish and English. It is more important for program content to be relevant. Why do they care? Why are they there? Why should they come back? This is where an interpreter may be needed.