Underserved Audiences

Underserved Defined
The term “underserved” deals with the demographic status of and the services that are offered or presented to a particular group. It is a segment of the community that is not currently being served by an organization. This term is sometimes used interchangeably with “underrepresented.”

Characteristics of Underserved Audiences:
- Gender
- Socioeconomic status
- Special needs/disability
- Ethnicity/race
- Income
- Language
- Literacy
- Geographic location

Identifying Underserved Audiences
It is important to use local connections to identify underserved audiences. Examples of local contacts might include:
- School counselors/teachers
- Neighborhood community groups
- Health departments
- Social service departments
- Board of supervisors
- Civic/social organizations
- Public housing communities
- 4-H leadership council
- Churches

Curriculum
The content must distinctly meet the audience’s needs. Existing curriculum may be appropriate to meet their needs, but sometimes existing curriculum must be adapted. Examples of curriculum adaptation:
- Six Easy Bites project record may have to be adapted for special-needs audiences. It is designed for 3rd graders to 5th graders; however, it may be suitable for an audience of special-needs youth who are 6th graders to 8th graders, depending on their needs.

- Hip Hop Education Guide Book (2008) is an alternate curriculum source that covers topics such as media and technology, leadership, and peer mediation. It could be used in conjunction with the 4-H curriculum Step Up to Leadership series to create a program that is more relevant to a specific targeted audience.

For Spanish speaking clients or participants, consider using existing Extension Spanish resources, such as:
- 5 Al Dia website: http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpafrutasyverduras/index.htm
- Extension in Spanish website: http://extensionenespanol.net/links.cfm?libraryid=4
- The SERA-37 land-grant college and university website is designed for educators working with Latino families: http://sera37.wordpress.com/resources/

Meeting with the Target Audience for Sustained Programming
Relationship building cannot be overstressed. It is critically important to develop caring relationships with the specific target audience.

A “caring relationship” is defined as one that has the capability to advance the growth of another individual. According to Walker and Snarey (2004), “[C]aring means liberating others from their state of need and actively promoting their welfare; care additionally means being oriented toward ethics grounded in empathy rather than dispassionate ethical standards.”
How Does Extension Care?
Extension cares by providing trained faculty and staff who operate within ethical standards. The faculty and staff provide programs based on relevant issues and identified needs of the audiences they are responsible for educating in various communities. The needs are addressed through relevant educational practices, and participants gain knowledge or skills or change their behaviors through various delivery modes.

At-Risk Audiences
A person placed “at-risk” implies that their circumstances put them at risk of future failure or lack of opportunity. The person lives in situations or exhibits behaviors that may impede success.

Examples of Risk Factors
- Dropping out of school/academic failure
- Underemployed/unemployed
- Court adjudicated youth/Suicidal behavior
- Teen pregnancy/Health problems/disease
- Drug use/abuse

Identifying At-Risk Audiences
It is important to use local connections to identify at-risk audiences. Examples of local contacts might include:

- School counselors/teachers
- Social service departments
- Juvenile detention centers
- Employment agencies
- Health departments
- Public housing authority

Importance of Collaborators/Partnerships
It may be important to collaborate or partner with other organizations/agencies that possess a particular expertise concerning these targeted audiences.

Examples of Partnerships/Collaborations
Collaborate with a juvenile detention center to implement a conflict-resolution program, develop a mentoring program, or start a 4-H club.

Needs Assessment
With both at-risk and underserved audiences, needs assessment must be an important prelude to program implementation and evaluation.

Needs Assessment Options:
- Develop a community needs-assessment survey.
- Meet with community parents to assess perceived needs.
- Meet with community partners to assess perceived needs.
- Create a focus group and assess needs for both at-risk and underserved audiences.

Delivery Modes
Always be cognizant of the various Extension delivery modes and use best practices after needs are assessed. Each audience may have a delivery mode that is more suitable than another.

Examples of Possible Delivery Modes:
- 4-H after-school clubs (charter after-school clubs)
- 4-H clubs (mentoring clubs or homework clubs)
- School enrichment (sports nutrition or biotechnology)
- 4-H camping
- 4-H special interest (science explorers or nutrition)
- In-school programming (life-science or safety)
- Cloverbuds

Marketing
Marketing to these audiences may include traditional modes of communication: letters, flyers, e-mail announcements, public service announcements, etc. However, relationship marketing may be critical with these target audiences.

Relationship Marketing
With Extension, “relationship marketing” is the “process of identifying and creating new value with individual customers” (Convergence Management, 2008, p. 1). Relationship marketing also deals with “getting the word out.” Some of these audiences require face-to-face contact. Relationships in this case may need to be built face-to-face. This means having “in-person contact” on a consistent basis with a specific targeted community or partner to share your product.

For Extension, some of our products include 4-H programs, 4-H curriculum, and family and consumer science workshops, just to name a few. Our products are developed to meet individual or societal needs. Relationships are important for satisfaction and on-going involvement in a program.

Resources