as potential burdens for economically disadvantaged groups.

- Develop a mailing list of providers and invite them to participate in programs run by your entire organization but especially those targeting the Latino community.
- Schedule training times to fit day care providers' schedules. Saturdays or evenings are usually preferred.
- Know which Latino subgroup you are working with (i.e., Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Chicanos, and South or Central Americans) and recognize any cultural differences that must be considered. Incorporate specific foods or dishes into the breaks of the training.
- Organize focus groups with Latino providers to determine topics for future programs.
- Ask a bilingual staff member to contact the providers the week before the program and remind them that their attendance is important.
- Place a Latino representative on the organization's Advisory Committee or Board to make them aware of your efforts.
- Conduct diversity training with staff members in an effort to broaden their knowledge, and involve them in more programming with Latino clientele.
- Repeat visits and calls to providers are necessary so that the community feels you are a constant presence and can be relied upon.
- Ask professionals who speak Spanish to present training classes. There are often proportionately few professionals available from some populations. An effective approach to this challenge might be networking with other agencies.
- Select an appropriate English and Spanish curriculum for Outreach sessions. Use the Internet to search for resources. If necessary, contact others in states with large Hispanic populations.
- Arrange for appropriate translations.
- Use interpreters at the Outreach sessions. Enlist bilingual and bicultural individuals who are native speakers and are aware of cultural implications.
- Convince participants that they are welcome. Consider experiences with discrimination that may cause potential participants to distrust the objectives or question the value of the program. Have Latino music playing as they enter the room where the Outreach session will occur.
- Food is very big in the Latino community so have Latino food at all the meetings. Assume that food will be a focus at the end of the meeting and use it as a way to get to know the key participants better.
- Time is fungible to Latinos. Plan on meetings beginning a little late and running over. Be ready to be flexible as Latinos may schedule meetings with very little notice and if you are not ready to change your plans, you will be left out of the loop.
- Be ready to solve the problems of other family members before you can gain the trust of the father and mother of a disabled child.

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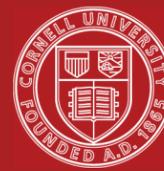
Cornell University
ILR School
Employment and Disability Institute

Work Incentives Support Center

Promising Practices

Creating Model Partnerships to Promote Employment of People with Disabilities

The Importance of Outreach to Underserved Populations

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Background

The United States has witnessed significant demographic changes in both urban and rural areas in recent times. Between 1990 and 2000, the US population grew to more than 281 million—an increase of nearly 33 million, the largest in any decade in American history. During that same decade, foreign immigration played a large and historically unprecedented role in contributing to the growth of the resident population of the US and the nation's labor force. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of new immigrants arriving in the US reached 13.2 million, accounting for about 41 percent of the growth in the nation's population. During the same decade, new immigrants contributed nearly one-half of the growth in the nation's labor force. When new immigrants are added to existing minority groups, the number of those individuals considered to be a member of a minority increases dramatically.

The growing numbers of those individuals considered members of minorities, as well as the increasing variety of minority groups (both ethnic and disability) created additional needs and special terms. The term socially disadvantaged group refers to groups whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group, without regard to their individual qualities. Other groups may experience prejudice as a result of an existing disability or diagnosis. These are also typically underserved groups.

Underserved groups have been handicapped by barriers that have resulted in low participation rates in the job market, especially if they have a physical or mental disability. It is often times difficult to get the attention of these underserved groups without making extraordinary efforts to reach out to their communities. Understanding the barriers that cause the low participation in our programs is the first step in removing these barriers.

This overview is not intended to be all-inclusive, but simply to discuss a few of the barriers that have caused this lack of participation and how specific projects have taken steps to address them.

Discrimination

As the definition of socially disadvantaged groups states, members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or disability prejudice because of their identity as members of a group, without regard to their individual qualities. Discrimination can create barriers to pursuing higher education and better employment opportunities.

Lack of Education

Discrimination has led to educational disadvantages for many socially disadvantaged groups. Many have been denied access to formal education or received a limited education. Many also struggle economically and are unable to pursue educational opportunities because of financial hardships.

Many minority immigrant groups also face educational disadvantages because their countries origin may have offered them few possibilities for formal education.

Differences in Language and Culture that Inhibit Communication

When members of a group have poor educational backgrounds, documents that require reading and writing skills can be intimidating, embarrassing and confusing. Written materials are seldom effective for conveying information in situations where the recipient has a limited educational background.

The dominant US culture relies heavily on the written word while many other cultures may emphasize oral and visual communication. Other cultural differences such as personal space, eye contact and different gestures can also inhibit or strain communications.

Limited English Skills

The large influx of immigrants in recent years has resulted in larger numbers within the US population for whom English is not their primary language. Breakdowns in communications arising from "English-as-a second-language" can create significant barriers to participation in social service and government programs.

Fear and Distrust of Government

Historically, many minority groups have been treated badly by government entities in their countries of origin. This often gives rise to a fear and distrust of government officials and agencies in the US.

That same distrust may also make it difficult for minority groups to approach, accept and cooperate with social service organizations. When approached by any government employee, or someone seen in an official capacity, a minority member may express alarm, doubt, or be coldly polite. This can be especially true if the employee is also a member of the majority culture.

We must keep these cultural differences and historic experiences in mind as we reach out to different communities. We may need to consider altering how we approach and interact with individuals from diverse communities. At the same time grouping people into categories such as these also can be misleading. We must be careful to avoid making broad assumptions about people based solely on appearances or ethnic or racial affiliation.

Now, that we understand some of the barriers, the next step is making a concerted effort to reach out to these underserved populations. Community outreach is at the heart of building a strong and responsive Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach (BPA&O) or Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program and allows each to provide the best possible customer service. Achieving an effective and inclusive community outreach program, however, does not happen overnight. It takes time, energy and commitment to build a strong and effective outreach program. Your efforts to include a broad range of community interests should not be driven by outside expectations but instead an internal desire to see all of the people with disabilities who wish to return to work in your community served in the most effective manner.

With that idea in mind, let's look at the efforts made in a number of communities by the BPAO and the PABSS projects.

Reaching Out to the Latino Community in Upstate New York and in New Jersey

Building trust and investing many hours of staff time has brought a level of comfort to allow the Resource Center for Independent Living in upstate New York and the New Jersey WINS project of New Jersey to successfully reach out to their respective latino communities. Not so surprisingly, BPA&O staff in both offices found that similar language barriers existed in both areas and that the same type of effort succeeded in both areas.

With the successful outreach efforts enumerated below, both agencies have seen dramatic increases in the numbers of latino clients served by the BPA&O program and by each office overall. Amazingly, both offices found that the latino community as a whole did not know of the agencies' existence before the outreach efforts. However, this will unfortunately become a trend when we explore efforts made to other underserved communities.

Identification of the Cultural Barriers

- Education levels - Latinos tend to have less education than other ethnic groups.
- Language barriers - According to the 2000 census, 78% of American Latinos speak Spanish at home. Bilingual staff is important and Outreach sessions need to be conducted in English and Spanish.
- Poverty - Approximately 23% of Hispanic families live below the poverty level, and Puerto Ricans have the lowest income of the three major sub-groups.
- Misunderstanding of cultural values - Latino cultural values, like personalism (there is nothing like face-to-face contact), familism (all decisions by the individual are made with regard to the well-being of the family first and foremost), and machismo, must be understood and addressed.
- Mistrust of Government agencies - Not-for-profit agencies are considered government agencies.
- Latinos engulf a disabled adult child and often infantalize him by doing everything for him. This can result in a distrust at the appearance of strangers who want to help. Thus, before the family will allow an agency to assist a disabled child, they must trust the individual offering assistance.

Methods Used To Increase Latino Involvement in the BPA&O Area

- Form partnerships with Latino agencies and community organizations to develop credibility with the clientele.
- Translate program flyers and registration materials into Spanish to increase attendance and accessibility.
- Schedule Latino neighborhood events that are easily accessible via public transportation. Consider transportation time and costs