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Title
Organizational Infrastructure Supporting Latinx Youth Engagement

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3. Organizational Infrastructure Supporting Latinx Youth Engagement

Introduction

Youth development programs that seek to increase and sustain the engagement of Latinx[1] youth and families recognize that their organizational infrastructure affects participation (Erbstein and Fabionar 2019). An organization's infrastructure includes its leadership, approaches to staff recruitment and hiring, location and accessibility, resource allocation, and policies and procedures. This brief details important infrastructure considerations based on a study of thirteen California youth development organizations across rural, suburban, and urban communities that successfully sustain Latinx youth participation over time (Moncloa et al. 2019).

Key Practices

Leaders intentionally engage Latinx youth

Organizational and program leaders understand both the challenges and strengths of their Latinx youth and families and make a point of collaboratively working with them to make a positive difference. They are able to identify, value, and acknowledge challenges, which may include immigration status, poverty, discrimination, exposure to violence, separation from family members, and other stresses. They also understand the contributions and assets of the

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1 Latinx: A person who lives in the United States who comes from, or whose parents, grandparents, or earlier ancestors came from, Latin America; may be mono-, bi-, or multilingual in Spanish, English, Brazilian Portuguese, or an indigenous language (e.g., Mixtec). This term dismantles the default masculine of romance languages; it's a gender-inclusive and gender-neutral term.

Staff members care deeply about youth participants, know how to help them feel safe and hold them to high standards, understand their experiences, and either know the local context or grew up with similar backgrounds.

Latinx community, such as formal and informal networks, language and intercultural navigation skills, and resilience and aspiration. These leaders develop and implement flexible policies and practices to facilitate a nimble staff response to Latinx family needs and interests.

Staff must be able to connect with Latinx youth and families

Organizational leaders privilege hiring a staff with demonstrated capacity and commitment to connect with local Latinx youth, viewing it as a non-negotiable qualification. Staff members share their experiences with youth as a strategy to build relationships. They care deeply about youth participants, know how to help them feel safe and hold them to high standards, understand their experiences, and either know the local context or grew up with similar backgrounds.

Location and accessibility influence participation—choose wisely

Organizational leaders select physical spaces for programmatic purposes that have a positive reputation, and are accessible via public transportation. In addition, place and routes to the facility are both physically and emotionally safe for all program participants.

You may need additional resources—plan for it

Organizational leaders and staff provide equitable access to all participants and eliminate participation barriers (e.g., transportation and program costs, limited English language proficiency). In this way, resource acquisition and allocation reflect an intentional commitment to equity and understanding of the local Latinx population's needs.

Conclusion

Organizational infrastructure matters to sustaining Latinx youth participation over time. To yield results, organizational leaders (1) intentionally engage this population, (2) recruit and hire appropriate staff, (3) recognize safe and accessible spaces, and (4) allocate resources to offset participation barriers.

References

Erbstein, N., and J. O. Fabionar. 2019. Supporting Latinx youth participation in out-of-school time programs: A research synthesis. Afterschool Matters 29:17–27. https://www.niost.org/Afterschool-Matters-Spring-2019/supporting-latinx-youth-participation-in-out-of-school-time-programs.

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