

CULTURAL RELEVANCE IN PARKS AND RECREATION

Community-centered and culturally responsive programming is a core component of parks and recreation. NRPA asked park and recreation professionals and community partners how they define cultural relevance, how they've applied it to their health programming and nutrition education and what successes, challenges and lessons they have learned from elevating cultural well-being in their park and recreation programs. The following are their responses, which demonstrate key practices and lessons learned for sustaining the cultural health of park and recreation communities.

WHAT CULTURAL RELEVANCE MEANS



Ensure that individuals and groups are truly seen and served



Be aware of the customs within the community you serve



Be open to understanding and learning about different segments of the community



Create avenues to help forge connections within the community

HEALTH PROGRAMMING

When asked how their agency has centered cultural relevance in their health programming, responses included:



Offer culturally responsive menu items, themes and foods at events and programs

- Offer multilingual programs, flyers, signage, recipe cards and activity cards.
- Ensure staff reflects the communities served
- Host culturally diverse events
- Present primary materials in different languages; provide English translations secondarily



- Partner with businesses and meal providers that provide culturally diverse meals
- Develop partnerships with multiculturally led organizations for collaboration, shared outreach and program facilitation



SUCCESSSES

Increased community participation and program growth were major successes that were seen as a result of culturally sustaining programs and practices. When asked to provide examples of successes with their work with cultural relevance, responses included:

Recruit community members to support translation services



Center equity with our agency's strategic plan

Meet the community where they are for maximum engagement



Recruit representative staff

CHALLENGES

Participants were asked to provide which challenges they encountered when centering cultural relevance in health programs. Challenges needing to be addressed include:



Language barriers for staff communicating with community members



Support cultural humility



Procure funding for affordable or no-cost programming to remove financial barriers



Lack of a city-wide commitment beyond an equity policy



Recognize this is not separate work; it is part of the whole



Limited staff time and experience-highlights the need to leverage multicultural partners



Reach target audiences through marketing



Hesitancy to acknowledge that our community is rapidly changing with an influx of multicultural neighbors



Staff are not reflective of community served

KEY LESSONS

Participants offered the following as key lessons learned:

- Meet community members where they are
- Use diverse channels of outreach, and don't rely solely on social media, as that can exclude those without access



- Refrain from "othering" language
- Approach with awareness and humility; center experiences of other cultures



- Ensure all voices are represented in the decision-making process; assume best intentions, don't make assumptions on behalf of others