Our top 10 list
for working with diverse audiences

The question: How to connect and serve diverse communities and engage in everyone’s growth and development. The authors have learned a great deal during their involvement in participatory social and economic projects. The top 10 list represents those things we consider critical. We hope these will invite meaningful conversations among Extension colleagues.

1. It takes time.
You will need time before, during, and after your “project” to build the relationship and maintain it. Organizations as well as individuals in these communities demand to be at the table from the beginning and fostering positive long lasting working relationships with them will take time.

2. You are never done!
At the end of a workshop, participants may connect with you about community resources or a personal matter. Be ready with culturally appropriate materials, preferably translated.

3. Understand that in certain cultures it is an offence to disagree with you.

4. Do not take things personally. It is not about you!
Be open minded to others having more urgent issues than what you might have thought. The community will let you know what issues should be addressed and how you can work with them to begin addressing issues in a positive and constructive way. They are tired of being seen from a deficit model approach; they know they have assets, they bring skills and knowledge to the table and our work should be inclusive of that.

5. Go into it with a spirit of exploration!
Approach diverse audiences with a willingness to learn and a respectful curiosity. It’s OK to ask questions, and it is OK to listen. The more you work with people, who are different than you, the more comfortable you will become, and you will get a better sense of the community’s “Way of Knowing.”

6. Relationship ethic is more important than work ethic!
Don’t come to meetings with an agenda—you’ll just be disappointed. You might have to collect data at a fiesta!

7. Never take words, concepts, objectives at face value...these things are loaded with multiple meanings and values. Words such success, resource or poverty, and many others have multiple meanings. Make an genuine effort to know and appreciate different ways of understanding the world.

8. Be where it happens.
Engaging with communities requires flexibility. A comfortable place to meet for them might not be yours.

9. Develop a cross cultural capacity.
You will need intercultural skills (communication, maybe a foreign language, experience working cross-culturally, key contacts in the community, etc.). If you can, get some training, experience difference so you are comfortable being “out” of your comfort zone. Use resources (trainings, co-workers, events, literature, art, etc.) to build these skills that you will have to put into practice.

10. Ask yourself “what is my commitment level?”
If you intend to be in and out of a community quickly, it might be best to discuss with a colleague that has existing/on-going relationship with the community if they would be willing to partner with you, and/or deliver the information.