

DIY DEI: An outreach, engagement, and accessibility toolkit for youth development professionals to better serve culturally diverse communities

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Introduction

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and cultural competency have become increasingly common, yet vastly complex topics to address in agricultural and extension education. With the agricultural industry continuously integrating globally, agricultural educators have been called to mobilize young people who are culturally competent and prepared to enter the modern workforce (Deen et al, 2014; Grant et al., 2020; Herndon et al., 2013; Monocloa et. al, 2019; Vincent & Torres, 2015; Woods, 2004). However, not only can youth recognize educators' implementation of cultural competency standards, youth also explicitly identify educational practices that do not align with a culturally competent mindset (Vincent & Torres, 2015). As such, a need for culturally competent educators has also been considerably acknowledged throughout formal and nonformal agricultural education settings (Deen et al, 2014; Grant, 2020; Herndon et al., 2013; Monocloa et. al, 2019; Vincent & Torres, 2015; Woods, 2004).

As a response to scholarly recommendation and an internal needs assessment, an educational resource, termed the Do-It-Yourself Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DIY DEI) toolkit, was developed to assist youth development professionals in navigating the widespread implementation of cultural competency, accessibility, and DEI practices. This professional development toolkit aligns with National AAEE Research Values related to ensuring diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging by empowering culturally competent and confidently prepared agricultural education professionals (AAEE, 2023).

Methodology

Through qualitative analysis of an organizational needs assessment, conducted in August 2022, a felt need emerged for an increase in cultural competency and DEI professional development resources for extension agents in Tennessee to foster belonging and equitable access to educational programming for youth from diverse backgrounds. The needs assessment detailed professional development exigencies regarding youth programming development and delivery for youth who identify as members of historically underrepresented communities. These underrepresented communities include ethnic and racial minorities, youth with limited English proficiency (LEP), and youth with physical and developmental exceptionalities such as autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The LGBTQIA+ community was also identified as a professional development need; however, due to legislation enacted during the project, these resources could not be provided in the toolkit. The DIY DEI toolkit was developed to address the dearth of related knowledge and resources for youth development agents in Tennessee. The DIY DEI toolkit takes two forms: a physical resource housed in a box mailed to each county and regional extension office in Tennessee, and a virtual format available to youth development personnel on an internal Microsoft Teams page.

Utilizing the THRIVE model (Arnold & Gagnon, 2019) as the conceptual framework for the development and curation of educational content, the toolkit includes factsheets, an inclusive leadership book, professional development opportunities, empirical scholarship on culturally

competent agricultural education, and funding opportunities to support DEI and programmatic accommodations. The educational factsheets discussed best practices regarding the following topics: inclusive terminology, programmatic cultural and ethnic insight, cultural exploration curriculum, curriculum tailored to youth with physical and developmental exceptionalities, and Spanish translated curriculum and informational resources. Additional documents in the toolkit include university DEI contacts and collaborating organizations, professional development opportunities, empirical agricultural education DEI literature, and grant opportunities.

Results to Date/Implications

The DIY DEI toolkit was completed and set to be distributed in December 2022. However, due to shifts in state legislation, the dissemination of the resource was temporarily paused. Despite this delay, the toolkit was shared, discussed, and disseminated at nine, in-person professional development opportunities throughout 2023. The response to the DIY DEI toolkit at these sessions was overwhelmingly positive by extension agents. Many extension agents expressed their excitement, need, and urgency to receive professional development tailored to authentically promoting and sustaining an inclusive youth program. One of the most requested and utilized resource in the DIY DEI toolkit was the Spanish translated curriculum and compliance documents. Conversely, the inclusive leadership book was educationally inconsequential, in comparison to other resources included in the toolkit, as agents mentioned their lack of intent to read the book due to professional time constraints and responsibilities. By developing and utilizing the DIY DEI toolkit, Tennessee youth development agents have the capacity to construct significant educational programs that are inclusive, relevant, and impactful for all Tennessee youth, no matter their cultural background.

Future Plans/Advice

The DIY DEI toolkit will be considered a living professional development resource, consistently evolving, as legislation and audience demands shift. Additionally, the toolkit will be regularly assessed by institutional human resources professionals to ensure continual compliance with state and federal legislation. As revisions are needed, the DIY DEI toolkit will be amended to mature and evolve with the legislative regulations and emergent needs of youth development professionals in Tennessee. Moving forward, we advise organizations to discuss the necessity and expectations regarding DEI and cultural competency materials with organizational leadership, legal counsel, and human resources professionals. Additionally, we encourage partnering with DEI offices across the institution, not only extension, to assist in funding, guidance, and support at a systemic level.

Costs/Resources

The primary expenditures of the toolkit are the personnel labor and time to develop the factsheets, curriculum, and logistical coordination. The secondary costs include document translation, book and box purchasing, and shipping. For this project, we allocated \$1,000 for translation, \$3,000 for book purchasing, \$250 for box purchasing, and \$600 for shipping, for a total of \$4,850. This project was funded through the institutional diversity and engagement offices.

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