

Designing a Culturally Relevant Program

To attract young people and new audiences, land trusts must offer high-quality, authentic outdoor programs that are meaningful for the target communities. Cultivating long-lasting connections between people and the outdoors will be achieved if we meet people where they are with culturally relevant programming.



Culture encompasses all aspects of our lives and includes language, history, values, norms, and customs. It is the lens through which an individual or group of people experience the world around them. Culture is much more than racial and ethnic background. It can include socioeconomic status or class; whether a community lives in an urban, suburban, or rural area; religious traditions and beliefs; level of education; age, and gender.

Programs or events that offer culturally appropriate programming is a surefire way to connect with a community you wish to engage. For example, although many Caucasian visitors frequently use open space and parks for passive, solitary activities, such as hiking or jogging, many ethnic cultures typically utilize open spaces for larger multi-generational gatherings or active recreational activities. A drum circle may be appealing to serve some, whereas a family-oriented nature walk paired with an unstructured play opportunity can appeal to young families. Younger individuals may seek activities with a social – and social media – component for meeting peers. Some senior populations may prefer activities that are slower-paced, or that allow them to be stationary within an outdoor space.

These and additional considerations are just as important as safety or liability issues. It is often helpful to conduct an informal assessment of your target community and address challenges such as physical barriers (e.g., fencing) as well as invisible barriers such as negative historical context around certain types of lands or perceptions about belonging in certain areas. In addition, it is important to assess the typical patterns of gathering for your target community and what types of activities are of interest.



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You don't have to do it by yourself! Consider opportunities for your target community to be actively involved in an educational aspect of your programming or events. For example, some Native American and Latino community members are knowledgeable about the use of native plants for medicinal purposes. A land trust could design a native plant nature walk in partnership with a community member who can offer historical, cultural, and other noteworthy information on the uses of certain plants found in nature.

Below are several reflective questions you can use to begin a conversation at your organization:

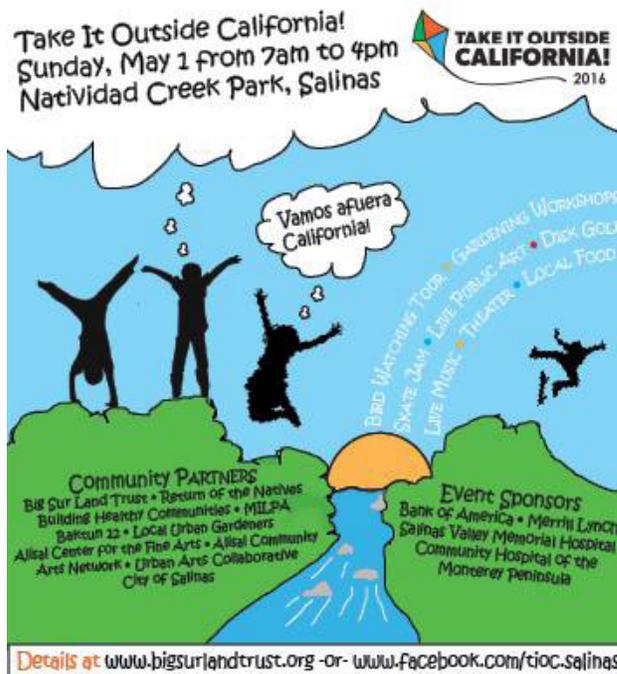
1. What do we know about cultural groups in our community? What is the awareness level of staff at different levels within the organization? To what extent is this based on direct knowledge and communication with community members?
2. Do we have a plan to address culturally relevant programming?
3. How can we assess what interests and preferences people in various cultural groups in the community may have? Who can help us with this assessment?
4. How can we address issues of cultural relevance as part of a self-assessment process? What are our program strengths in these areas?
5. What can we do to avoid and address stereotypes and bias?
6. Does our staff or board include members representing the communities we serve?
7. What is one activity we can offer that is culturally relevant for young people or new audiences?

John Muir Land Trust

hosted a guided tour in English and Spanish of a conserved property. The tour incorporated an app that guided participants to relevant sites along the hike and explained the historical and native cultural significance of the various locations.



Big Sur Land Trust had reached out to the community of Salinas in the few years preceding this event by doing outdoor programs for youth, but this large community-based event at Natividad Creek Park was a new event. Keeping in mind the local community who use the park, and also wanting to design programs and activities that were relevant to that community, BSLT decided on having a wide range of activities such as a nature walk and bird viewing, gardening workshops, disc golf, community exercise and yoga, a skateboarding competition, live music, art demonstrations and theater performances.



“Most of the participants and families were regular park visitors, but most also did not know about the Big Sur Land Trust or about the conservation work in the community we are embarking on.”

- Trent, Big Sur Land Trust

“We offered a Spanish - language registration page, and had Spanish interpreters on hand for the event. We did attract new and first time participants, especially children and families.”

- Ingrid, Sonoma Land Trust

