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## Inclusive Scholarship: Extension Program Participants as Poster Coauthors

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## **Inclusive Scholarship: Extension Program Participants as Poster Coauthors**

### **Abstract**

The poster is a promising mechanism for inclusive scholarship. Inclusive scholarship provides direct opportunities for inclusion and representation. Community partner and youth participants in an urban gardening program were engaged in program-related scholarship via involvement in creation of a poster and its presentation at a community engagement conference. This article explains how including partners and youths as coauthors and copresenters helped Extension professionals reach a wider audience while deepening relationships, empowering youth participants, and improving data quality.

**Keywords:** [CYFAR](#), [scholarship](#), [participant engagement](#), [youth empowerment](#)

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## **Introduction**

Extension professionals make a variety of contributions to knowledge dissemination and translation to community audiences. Moreover, they are expected to contribute to the scholarly literature as well. They must maintain awareness that the publications environment is shifting, with increasing emphasis on quality metrics and varying expectations for scholarship (Braverman, 2018). Demonstration of Extension scholarship involves generating (a) peer-reviewed academic products (e.g., journal articles, competitive grants, conference presentations), (b) applied products (e.g., curricula, fact sheets, technical guides), and (c) community products (e.g., newsletters, blogs, websites, reports, displays, and mobile applications that address community needs). Herein, we introduce a scholarship tool that can be used to share best practices with peers, engage and empower Extension program participants, and document program effectiveness. We describe this tool within the context of the program in which we have used it, but its applicability within Extension is broad.

## **Program Description**

The program with which we are involved, Urban Gardening Entrepreneurs Motivating Sustainability (Urban GEMS) (<http://urbangems.ehe.osu.edu/>), is an elective course for 8th graders, an afterschool academic enrichment

program, and a summer program for youths aged 8–18 residing in economically distressed urban neighborhoods. Participants in our pilot sample were African American, 12.3 years old on average, and 68.4% female; 94.7% received free or reduced-price lunches. Through Urban GEMS and the program's associated community partnerships, youths are engaged in implementing cutting-edge food production technology to grow healthful foods in various, and sometimes unlikely, urban locales and in consuming the foods they produce.

Early evaluation results showed strong promise for achieving project goals. Participants reported increased nutritional knowledge, increased vegetable and fruit consumption, decreased unhealthful eating habits, increased resiliency/grit, and increased community involvement in changing patterns of food consumption. Additionally, insights revealed about why community stakeholders and participants were engaged with the project were powerful in demonstrating the value of the project to the targeted audience.

## **Development of an "Inclusive Scholarship" Poster**

Our Urban GEMS team strongly relies on the involvement of community partners in program development, implementation, and evaluation. Moreover, participants' perspectives help shape and refine our approach. Therefore, with the intention of engaging our community partners and program participants in scholarship, we collaboratively prepared a poster for The Ohio State University's Community Engagement Conference (<https://engage.osu.edu/conference>). This annual conference provides professional development and networking opportunities related to supporting health and wellness in communities.

Although literature has described youth poster contests (Ripberger, 2014), we did not find guidance for involving program participants in preparing and presenting a scholarly poster. Moreover, discussion of best practices has not highlighted inclusive scholarship as we are defining it: a tool for Extension professionals (Calleson, Jordan, & Seifer, 2005; Franz, 2011a, 2011b). Therefore, we developed a process to achieve our goal. Urban GEMS staff members devised and used five steps for creating an inclusive scholarship poster:

1. Design the poster using PowerPoint technology.
2. Invite 12 individuals involved with the program to contribute to the poster via face-to-face, telephone, or email contact.
3. Insert responses from contributors (coauthors) into a template, and edit them for grammar and spelling, and slightly for length where necessary.
4. Distribute the poster to the contributors for review, and revise as recommended.
5. Print the poster at the university's bookstore, for a cost of \$63.

To collect input from the 12 contributors, the poster organizers invited both adults and youths to respond to four questions about their experiences with Urban GEMS.

We received important responses from our community partners. For example, the director of a participating school wrote this:

All [School] students are benefiting from the infusion of living food gardens inside our building. It is a joy to listen to students' comments about eating directly from the towers. My students are enjoying the

program which offers them exposure to wellness information, real life applications with food, and career exploration experiences. I am still impressed by how well the program team was able to offer the Urban GEMS "hands on" curriculum as a part of the students' weekly school schedule. This ensured that all students could be enriched by the opportunity.

Youths' perspectives were equally valuable. The following examples are excerpts from statements by two youths:

I like Urban GEMS because it is a fun program that is changing the Southside community through gardening. I never thought of that being a way to change lives but it is having a tremendous impact. Urban GEMS is teaching me how to grow my own food and how to use my resources.

The thing that I like most about Urban GEMS is that I get to watch the food grow and take care of the plants. Also I enjoy working with plants 1 on 1. Urban GEMS is teaching me to build trust with others, to run a business, practice public speaking and having a proper attitude for success when working with others.

Once the poster was completed, participants gathered at one of the Urban GEMS sites to view it and to rehearse their talking points for the conference. All coauthors were registered for the conference and encouraged to fully participate, including by presenting their experiences in their own voices during the conference (Wilkinson et al., 2018). The completed poster can be viewed at <https://kb.osu.edu/handle/1811/84751>.

## Results

Almost 800 people attended the conference. Our project team presented the poster and distributed brochures to 63 poster visitors in 90 min. The youth coauthors presented the poster, with the guidance of the adult coauthors. The Urban GEMS poster presentation was the only example of youth participation in scholarly dissemination at the conference. Conference attendees were most interested in learning about what the youths felt they were gaining from the program, how the indoor growing systems worked, and what plans the team had for expanding opportunities to other youths. We received compliments regarding the youths' preparation and professionalism. Urban GEMS realized benefits of partner and youth collaboration in the poster beyond the conference presentation in several ways: (a) our team was invited to make five subsequent presentations to community groups about our work; (b) youths debriefed their peers about their conference experiences at The Ohio State University; (c) youths expressed pride in cocreating a poster about their work and an appreciation that their voices were deemed important enough to be featured in the poster; and (d) contributors from the different implementation sites learned about one another's experiences in cocreating Urban GEMS.

## Conclusion

Engaging participants in generating scholarship was an attempt to strengthen relationships while teaching about the importance of evaluation in generating knowledge for the community. Our approach to inclusive, engaged scholarship also exposed youths to professional development opportunities and the career pathways of Extension professionals and university scholars. Our experience suggests that the process of cocreating/copresenting a scholarly poster with partners and program participants can deepen relationships, empower youth participants, and improve evaluation data quality. Creating space for youths' voices at venues that have historically not included young people holds promise for richer community-engaged scholarship. An inclusive scholarship poster designed and presented collaboratively can be a powerful tool for Extension.

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