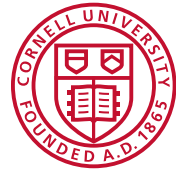


Cornell Cooperative Extension

Cornell Garden-Based Learning



Adult Learning and Peer Learning Networks FAQs

Q: If I'm fundamentally interested in gardening, why take time to explore how to enhance a learning experience?

A: An important part of this journey as a Cooperative Extension volunteer is engaging in your own reflection about your motives, hopes, and experiences, as well as exploring your biases and unconscious perspectives. If you don't have a clear understanding of your own motivations, then it's easy to fail to differentiate between self and other, and we run a serious risk of projecting our own interests on others! For example, you may be interested in the best cultivars of tomatoes, but those with whom you are working might fundamentally be more interested in another aspect of gardening – or the audiences they serve.

Q: I'm really just interested in working on my own. Do I really need to get involved with working with others?

A: The Cooperative Extension volunteer experience is fundamentally a process of engagement, which isn't possible without connection. In fact, some of your activities will be most successful when done collaboratively. Commitment by and engagement of volunteers in collaborative teams can be a key element in establishing, maintaining and experience successful relationships in an adult learning environment.

Q: What is most important for me to know about adult learning?

A: That's a lot to distill into one answer! But it could be helpful to know that there are some critical elements that we will invite you to occasionally reflect on.

- 1) **Reciprocity.** We all have responsibilities, we contribute, and learn from each other.
- 2) **Learning.** Learning is fundamentally the purpose, product and process of a volunteer experience. That's why it will be essential to come to know and understand yourself and others through the lens of adult learning. As a volunteer who may be leading others, you will need to know how to engage and guide your audience appropriately and create a climate that supports learning.
- 3) **Relationship.** Strong relationships motivate, inspire and support learning and development. Good relationships take time to grow. From the beginning, there must be mutual trust and openness, as well as a willingness to honor each who becomes involved in our programs.
- 4) **Partnership.** A good relationship forms the basis for strong partnerships in your county and helps to establish agreements anchored in trust. With strong partnerships

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Diversity and Inclusion are a part of Cornell University's heritage. We are a recognized employer and educator valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities.

you can both feel secure in building and strengthening the relationship – and to holding one another accountable.

- 5) **Collaboration.** As adult learners working together, you are building relationships, sharing knowledge, and occasionally coming to agreement about certain actions as well as why you're engaging in them. Then you actively work together to achieve them.
- 6) **Mutually defined goals.** Volunteering must flow in the direction of defined goals – otherwise, like a stream without a clear channel, your work will meander until it dries up. It is vital to understand your own learning goals and that of your program at the beginning and to review them occasionally. This means asking questions, listening to answers, and engaging in ongoing conversations to ensure that you select meaningful goals to guide the work.
- 7) **Development.** With a good adult learning model, your volunteer experience will support your development and growth, and that of others.

Q: It sounds as if I need to shift my thinking from 'teaching' to 'facilitating learning.' What is important to know about this?

A: Adults learn best when they are involved in planning, implementing and evaluating their own learning. The role of the facilitator is therefore to create and maintain a supportive climate that promotes conditions necessary for learning to take place. Adult learners have a need to be self-directing, too – not force fed – and their readiness for learning increases when there is a specific need to know. In our work in garden-based environments, life's reservoir of experience is a primary learning resource; the life experiences of others enrich the learning process. We want to have opportunities to apply things – not just hear about them in lecture format – and adults are going to respond best when they are motivated. If you can hold that in mind, you are off to a really great start!

Q: This is all so exciting! I want to learn more, what do you suggest?

A: In the past several decades, new knowledge about adult learning has expanded hugely! You might want to probe further and search by topics such as growth mindsets; emotional intelligence; self-directed learning; and transformational learning.



Published: April 2019

Contributor(s): Marcia Eames-Sheavly

Reviewer(s): Fiona Doherty, Donna Alese Cooke, Michelle Podolec