

Planning for Grand Rapids in 2021!

Courtney Aldrich (MI), Annual Session Planning Committee Co-liaison

Hello from Michigan, NEAFCS friends and colleagues! My name is Courtney Aldrich and I serve as a Michigan Regional Co-chair and a Co-liaison for the NEAFCS Annual Session planning committee. We are getting excited about the possibilities for hosting the conference on November 2-5, 2021 in Grand Rapids!

As we begin to finalize the plans and bring the conference to reality, one of our first tasks is to select a keynote speaker for the opening session. We are absolutely delighted to introduce to you our keynote speaker for 2021, Dionardo E. Pizaña. Dionardo is the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Specialist for MSU Extension. He has over 25 years of experience developing, teaching, and facilitating diversity education programs through Michigan State University Extension, Adrian College, and Siena Heights University. He is a nationally recognized multicultural consultant, speaker and trainer. Dionardo's work as an activist and educator is grounded in his conviction that deep and lasting institutional change requires an equally strong commitment to "working on oneself" while nurturing authentic relationships across difference. He believes that authenticity is far more than mere friendship or working affiliation. It is based on trust, honesty, risk-taking, mutual responsibility, humility, and acceptance that tension in relationships is a necessary component that leads to growth. As a lifelong learner around issues related to social justice and change, Dionardo has participated in foundational learning opportunities such as cultural bridges, VISIONS training, Opening Doors and The People's Institute. His ongoing commitment to issues of social justice continues a legacy of community and social justice work inspired by his parents and grandparents. He is also a guest instructor for the MSU National Charrette Institute training programs.



While I took the information above directly from Dionardo's bio, I want to add a personal statement to affirm Dionardo's passion for diversity, equity, and inclusion work, as well as his accessible and gentle manner that immediately puts at ease those in his presence. He makes a challenging topic and challenging conversations feel safe. We are so fortunate to have Dionardo guide our work at MSU Extension, and are excited to have him share some of his skills and expertise with you. This is the right time for this keynote speaker and this topic. We hope you share in our excitement!