Managing 4-H: What's Working and What's Not
Based on a Eureka County Assessment

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Introduction
In 2002 4-H will celebrate its 100th birthday. From its humble birth in rural America through boys corn clubs and girls canning clubs, early 4-H programs emphasized agricultural science education. It was discovered that youth were more open to new ideas and provided a link between Land Grant research information and farm families. The Land-Grant universities also believed that 4-H could help interest rural youth in agriculture during the 19th century when they were migrating to cities to “escape the plow.”

Although agricultural science remains an important part of traditional programs, 4-H has broadened its educational scope to meet the interests of urban youth as well. It has evolved into a national and international youth development program. It strives to remain “child centered” in its approach to education and requires adult role modeling and involvement.

The centennial celebration is an opportunity for the Land Grant system to objectively assess how successful 4-H is today in reaching youth and making a positive difference in their lives. A critical component of a successful 4-H program is effective management. Management of 4-H programs involves communication, membership recruitment, recruitment and education of adult volunteer leaders, program design and coordination, and program evaluation.

In January 2001, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension designed and piloted a mail survey in Lyon County to assess how effectively 4-H is achieving its management goals. The survey was implemented in other counties in Nevada, including Eureka County. Assessment at the county level is necessary as 4-H programs in Nevada are managed and changes are implemented at the county level.

Designing and Conducting the Assessment
The success of any 4-H program begins with the day-to-day management of 4-H at multiple levels. These levels include:

✓ Management of 4-H projects by adult volunteer leaders as trained and supervised by 4-H program staff;
✓ Management of community 4-H clubs by adult volunteer leaders who wish to
play a role in shaping the direction of 4-H within the community; and

✔ Management of 4-H programs countywide through supervision by Cooperative Extension staff, including 4-H program officers and assistants, extension educators and administrators.

Management goals include membership recruitment as well as curriculum and program design, project variety and competitive events. Management also includes how Cooperative Extension staff communicates information to program participants and recruits, and prepares adult volunteer leaders to guide youth activities. Based upon this management approach, ten questions were developed to assess whether 4-H is meeting its management goals in order to positively impact youth development. Opportunity was given for survey participants to comment about what they “like best, like least” and “would like to change” about 4-H.

The questionnaire was sent to adult volunteer 4-H leaders and the parents of youth enrolled in Eureka County 4-H. The survey participants were selected because leaders and parents have the greatest opportunity to observe the effects on youth of 4-H programs. Also, 4-H leaders are directly involved in achieving many 4-H management goals.

Each individual was sent a two-page questionnaire with instructions and a self-addressed and stamped return envelope. Also included was a cover letter that explained the purpose of the survey and thanked them for their participation. Of the 75 survey recipients, 17 returned completed questionnaires, resulting in a 23 percent response rate.

Results of the Assessment

On a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” being “ineffective” and “5” being “very effective,” respondents were asked to circle the number that best indicates how effective 4-H is in achieving its management goals. Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate they “didn’t know.” The results were sorted into two groups by combining the highest ratings into one group and the lowest ratings into a second group.

Management goals, as indicated by the majority of respondents as being effective and very effective, are illustrated in Figure 1. Goals that the majority of respondents indicated that Eureka County 4-H is “ineffective” and “very ineffective” are illustrated in Figure 2. The questions are listed below each bar graph illustrating percentage response.

The management goals rated most frequently effective in Eureka County are: 4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren) and quality of adult leadership is key to achieving a successful 4-H program. Also rated as effective management goals are: 4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events and 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Eureka county. Management goals that were rated as either ineffective or very ineffective indicate goals that are not being adequately reached and need improvement. In Eureka County these include: 4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects.

In Eureka County, the majority of respondents indicated they reside in a rural area (76%), followed by farm (18%) and urban (6%). The majority of respondents (82%) indicated they were white. Approximately 35 percent of respondents reported that as a child, s/he had participated in 4-H, while 65 percent of the respondents had served as a volunteer leader. The average length of time served as a volunteer 4-H leader was 2 years.
Figure 1
How much your child is learning as a result of 4-H

Goals Most Frequently Rated as Effective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Eureka County</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project materials my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative 4-H projects, such as snowboarding, teach my child valuable skills</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent indicating Eureka County 4-H has been “effective” or “highly effective”
### Figure 2
#### How much your child is learning as a result of 4-H

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals Most Frequently Rated as Ineffective</th>
<th>Percent indicating Eureka County 4-H has been “ineffective” or “highly ineffective”</th>
<th>Percent Ineffective &amp; Very Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selected Survey Comments

With regards to management effectiveness, what respondents liked best about 4-H are illustrated by the following quotes:

✓ I like everything I’ve seen.
✓ Meetings. Demos. Leader.
✓ The enthusiasm the leaders put forth and the skills our children have learned.
✓ Meetings are not only scheduled by leader, but were mailed out as reminders.

In contrast, what respondents liked least about 4-H are:

✓ The program is lacking community support as well as county funding for needed improvements.
✓ The journals.
✓ It only goes on for part of a year.

When asked “if you could change anything about 4-H what would you change” respondents indicated the following:

✓ Fairground improvements to make the fair run smoother.
✓ Funding to improve the opportunities to the kids.
✓ Indoor arena at fairgrounds.
✓ The record books seem to be very repetitive and could be organized better.
Conclusions
To summarize, an assessment of the effectiveness of the management of Eureka County 4-H indicates that 4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools and quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program. Also indicated as effective teaching tools are 4-H newsletters. Assessment results indicated further that 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Eureka county. However, there appears to be a critical need to attract children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and improve volunteer leader training to further strengthen Eureka County 4-H.

Additionally, respondents indicate that Cooperative Extension staff needs to provide more age-specific projects. The assessment indicates that 4-H should strive harder to obtain funding to improve the opportunities to the kids and make fairground improvements to make the fair run smoother.

A statistical test for content validity and reliability of this questionnaire was surprisingly low compared with results in other counties where the survey has been replicated. The statistic may be low due to the fact that in Eureka County, 4-H membership includes a very large range of ages. Parents of pre-schoolers are likely to answer these questions much differently than parents of teenagers.

The questionnaire is still considered a reliable assessment tool. Efforts are currently underway to replicate this assessment using the same questionnaire in other counties in Nevada. Once additional data are gathered, Cooperative Extension will be able to further assess 4-H program effectiveness. Any changes made to 4-H as a result of these assessments, however, must be discussed and carefully contemplated, involving 4-H staff statewide. The results of these assessments can be used to begin the process in an informed and positive manner.

References
