

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Bringing the University to You

Fact Sheet-01-35

Managing 4-H: What's Working and What's Not Based on an Elko County Assessment

Loretta Singletary, Extension Educator, Central Area
Marilyn Smith, Northeast Area Youth Development Specialist
Myrna Fisher, 4-H Program Assistant, Elko

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 is being implemented in other counties in Nevada, including Elko 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 4H leaders and the parents of youth enrolled in Elko 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 225 survey recipients, 52 returned completed questionnaires, resulting in a 23 percent response rate.

Results of the Assessment

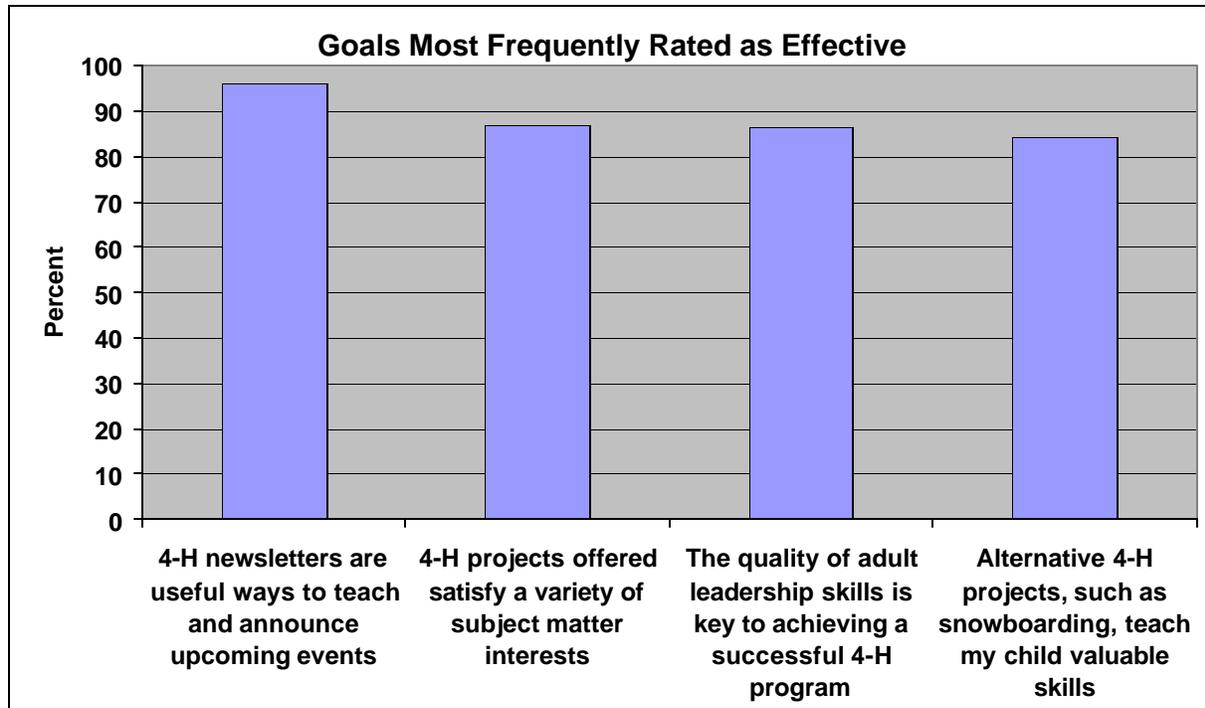
On a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” being “ineffective” and “5” being “very effective,” respondents were asked to circle the number that best indicates how effective 4-H is in achieving its management goals. Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate they “didn’t know.” The results were sorted into 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 Elko County 4-H is “ineffective” and “very ineffective” are illustrated in Figure 2. Ten questions are listed below each bar graph illustrating percentage responses for each question.

The management goal rated most frequently effective in Elko County is *4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events*. Also rated as effective management goals are: *4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests, the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program, and alternative 4-H projects, such as snowboarding, teach my child valuable skills*. Management goals that were rated as either ineffective or very ineffective indicate goals that are not being adequately reached and need improvement. In Elko County these include: *4-H record book keeping teaches valuable skills; volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects; project materials a child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project and; 4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds*.

In Elko County, the majority of respondents indicated they reside in a rural area (56%), followed by farm (29%) and urban (10%). The majority of respondents (82%) indicated they were white. Approximately 56 percent reported that as a child, s/he had participated in 4-H, while 56 percent of the respondents had served as a volunteer leader. The average length of time served as a volunteer 4-H leader was approximately 6 years.

Table 1
Goals rated by parents and volunteers as effective



Goals rated by parents and volunteers as effective	Percent Effective & Very Effectived
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	96
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	87
The quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	87
Alternative 4-H projects, such as snowboarding, teach my child valuable skills	84
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	83
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	75
Project materials my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project	69
Elko County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Elko County	69
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	64
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	54

Table 2
Goals rated by parents and volunteers as ineffective



Goals rated by parents and volunteers as ineffective	Percent Ineffective & Very Ineffective
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	10
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	10
Project materials my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project	8
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	8
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	4
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	4
Alternative 4-H projects, such as snowboarding, teach my child valuable skills	4
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	2
The quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	2
Elko County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Elko County	2

Selected Survey Comments

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

- ✓ *The feeling of involvement for my children.*
- ✓ *The positive interaction between children and adults.*
- ✓ *The camaraderie among the members at county events.*
- ✓ *Great Extension office staff very helpful; community involvement; [work] ethic and community service.*
- ✓ *I think we have some of the best county leaders there are. They are enthusiastic and emphasize learning and growing more than winning and competition.*

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

- ✓ *Older kids have dropped out, and judges at fair time teach few if any tips.*
- ✓ *Lack of commitment of some members and leaders.*
- ✓ *Lack of information received by the county offices from the state office.*
- ✓ *I see a lot of parents doing the things that the children should be doing (f0r example – getting sheep ready for show).*

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

- ✓ *More parental involvement.*
- ✓ *I would encourage a junior leadership program, where each first year member is paired with a junior leader to help the first year member learn the ropes (i.e. record book, fair, etc.)*
- ✓ *Fair judges need to be more qualified and give more help to the 4-H'ers.*
- ✓ *Leaders meet with the kids at least once a month to help with projects.*
- ✓ *Need to have more adult interaction with children to explain 4-H programs available and expectations of the children.*

Conclusions

To summarize, an assessment of the effectiveness of the management of Elko County 4-H indicates that 4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events. Also indicated as effective is that 4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter, the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program and alternative 4-H projects, such as snowboarding, teach children valuable skills. However, there appears to be a critical need to improve how youth are taught to complete 4-H record books to further strengthen Elko County 4-H. Additionally, respondents indicate that Cooperative Extension staff needs look into forming a junior leadership program, encourage more parental involvement and hire qualified judges and have judges do more teaching..

A statistical test for content validity and reliability of the pilot questionnaire was very high (.92), indicating that the questionnaire is 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

Andrews, N.S. and S. Russell. 2000. "Broadening the Perspective on Health and Youth Development," The Center. The University of Minnesota: Communication and Technology Services.

Traub, R.E. 1994. Reliability for the Social Sciences: Theory and Applications. Vol. 3. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

USDA website. 2001. "A Clover is Born." http://www.reeusda.gov/4h/4h_history.htm.

The University of Nevada, Reno is an Equal Opportunity/ Affirmative Action employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, creed, national origin, veteran status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation . The University of Nevada employs only United States citizens and aliens lawfully authorized to work in the United States.