

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Managing 4-H: What's Working and What's Not Based on a Las Vegas, Clark 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 embarked on a process to assess the 4-H program in the areas of life skill development and program management. The survey was piloted in Lyon County in January. The survey was distributed in the metropolitan Las Vegas area in Clark County in June of the same year. Assessment at the county level is necessary because 4-H programs in Nevada are managed at the county level. The Las Vegas area was split from the northeast Clark County area as it is managed out of a different office.

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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 Clark 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 181 surveys sent, 48 were returned resulting in a 26% response rate.

Results of the Assessment

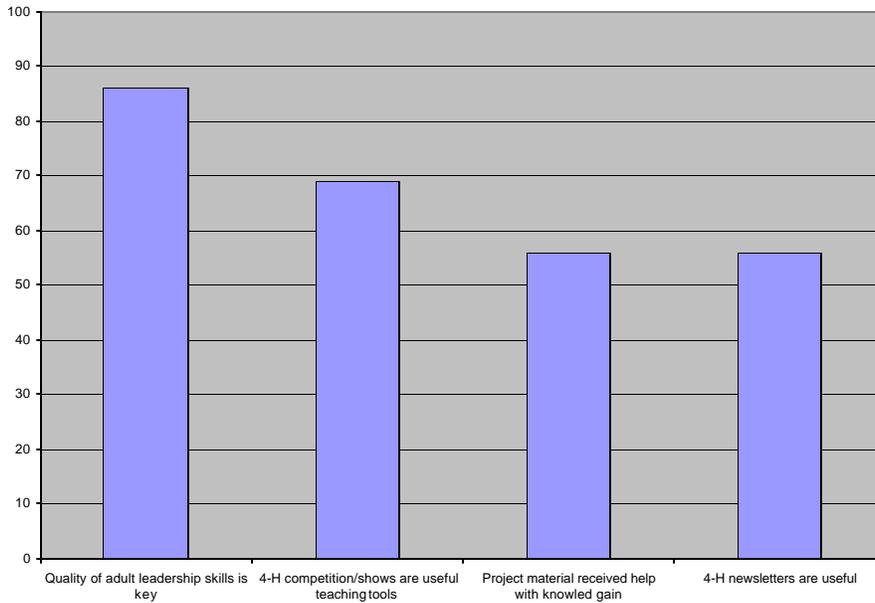
On a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” being “ineffective” and “5” being “very effective,” respondents were asked to circle the number that best indicates how effective 4-H is in achieving its management goals. Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate they “didn’t know.” The results were sorted into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

The management goal rated most frequently effective in the Las Vegas area is *the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program*. Also rated as effective management goals are: *4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child, project materials my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project and; 4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events*. Management goals that were rated as either ineffective or very ineffective indicate goals that are not being adequately reached and need improvement. In the Las Vegas area these include: *alternative 4-H projects, such as skateboarding, teach my child valuable skills, 4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests, and 4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds*.

In the Las Vegas area of Clark County, the majority of respondents indicated they reside in an urban area (52%), followed by rural (29%). The majority of respondents (73%) indicated they were white with a smaller portion (15%) reporting they were Hispanic. One third reported that as a child, s/he had participated in 4-H. Over half (60%) of the respondents *had never* served as a volunteer leader. Of the respondents who answered this question, the average length of time served as a volunteer 4-H leader was three years.

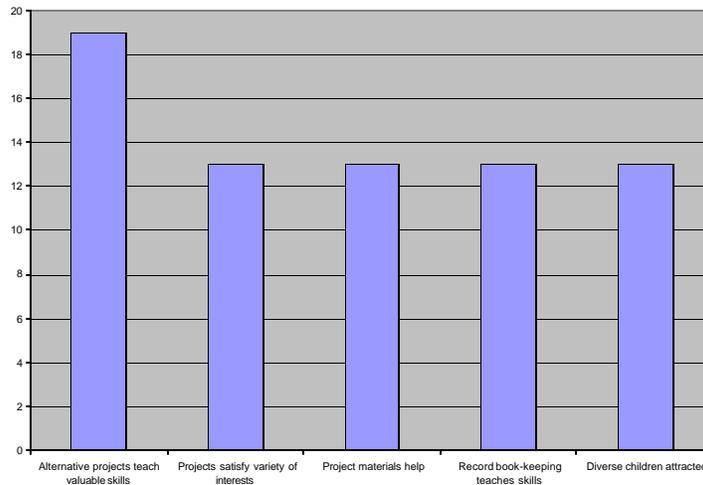
Most Frequent Frequently Rated "Effective or Very Effective"



Percent indicating Las Vegas area, Clark County 4-H has been “effective” or “highly effective”

	Percent Effective & Very Effective
The quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	86
4-H competition/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	69
Project material my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project	56
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	56
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	52
4-H record book keeping teaches valuable skills	50
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	40
Clark County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Clark County	40
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	31
Alternative 4-H projects, such as skateboarding, teach my child valuable skills	31

Most Frequent Responses Indicating "Ineffective or Highly Ineffective"



Percent indicating Las Vegas Area, Clark County 4-H has been “ineffective” or “highly ineffective”	Percent Ineffective & Very Ineffective
Alternative 4-H projects, such as skateboarding, teach my child valuable skills	19
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	13
Project materials my child receives help him/her to gain project related knowledge and skills	13
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	13
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	13
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	6
Clark County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Clark County	6
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	4
The quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	4
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	

Selected Survey Comments

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

- ✓ *The variety of projects and programs*
- ✓ *There is a focus on knowledge*
- ✓ *Everybody is very friendly and the kids are not too competitive*
- ✓ *The quality of the County staff*
- ✓ *Creative approaches to new projects*
- ✓ *Something for everyone*
- ✓ *Traditions*
- ✓ *Different activities available to my children*
- ✓ *Opportunities beyond club level*
- ✓ *The kids are friendly and helpful to new members*
- ✓ *The Extension Specialist are very willing to help*

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

- ✓ *Disorganized. Information arrives too late*
- ✓ *Hard to find out information if not already enrolled*
- ✓ *The paperwork, but I realize it needs to be done*
- ✓ *Lack of information concerning upcoming events*
- ✓ *Inner city kids get more funding and get the least out of it*

- ✓ *Lack of participants*
- ✓ *Not enough people know about it*
- ✓ *Needs more younger children’s activities*
- ✓ *Short notice of events*
- ✓ *Need more info in schools to enroll more members*

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

- ✓ *Better organization between leaders*
- ✓ *More funding and advertising*
- ✓ *More flexibility when it comes to choosing methods children can use to reach their goals*
- ✓ *Promote record books at the County level and have them judged*
- ✓ *Use uniforms*
- ✓ *Amount of money Extension has to work with – they need more*
- ✓ *Recruit more members*
- ✓ *Use 4-H record books*
- ✓ *More communication about programs*
- ✓ *More planning will generate more interest in events*
- ✓ *More community service required for projects – that’s what 4-H is for*
- ✓ *Greater availability of printed project material – up to date*

Conclusions

To summarize, an initial assessment of the effectiveness of the management of Las Vegas area 4-H indicates that the quality of volunteer leadership is key to the success of the program. Also indicated as effective was the teaching value of competitions and shows, quality project material as useful teaching tools, and the effectiveness of newsletter to communicate with 4-H members and leaders. However, there appears to be a critical need to examine “alternative” type projects for effectiveness. Comments on the effectiveness of record books ranged from questioning their usefulness to encouraging widespread use as a teaching tool. This divergent opinion on a traditional component of 4-H programs can assist Extension staff and volunteers in program planning.

Additionally, respondents indicate that Cooperative Extension staff needs to strive to communicate clearly with all 4-H participants well in advance of any activities. The staff and program partners may want to consider working together to better promote the 4-H program and ensure that all interested citizens of the area have promotional information readily available to them.

A statistical test for content validity and reliability of the pilot questionnaire was very high (97%), 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

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