



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Fact Sheet 01-66

Managing 4-H: What's Working and What's Not Based on a Lincoln 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 Lincoln 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.

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 Lincoln County 4H. 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 80 surveys mailed, 13 were returned for a response rate of 16.25%. Although this is an allowable return rate for a mailed survey, small numbers used in statistical analysis must always be cautioned.

Results of the Assessment

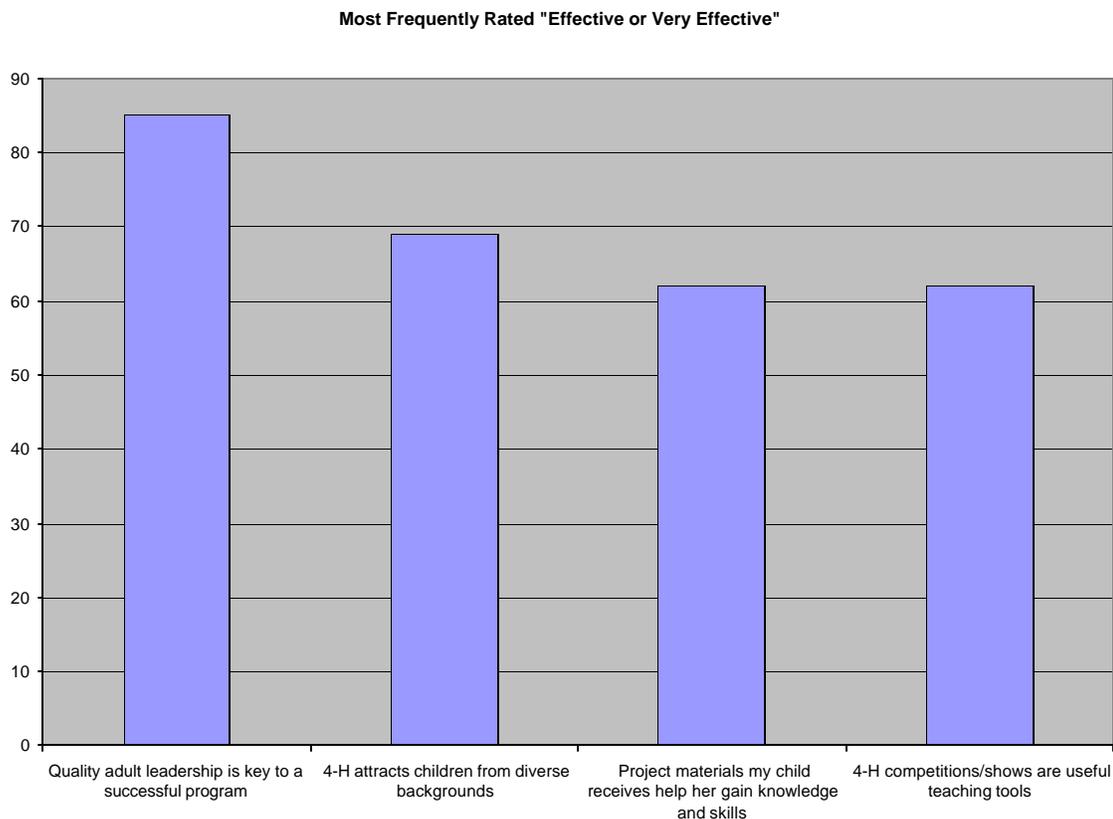
On a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” being “ineffective” and “5” being “very effective,” respondents were asked to circle the number that best indicates how effective 4-H is in achieving its management goals. Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate they “didn’t know.” The results were sorted into 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 Lyon County 4H 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 Lincoln County is *the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4H program*. Also rated as effective management goals are: *4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds; and 4-H competitions are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)*. Management goals that were rated as either ineffective or very ineffective indicate goals that are not being adequately reached and need improvement. In Lincoln County these include: *Project materials my child receives help him-her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project; alternative 4H projects, such as card making, teach my child valuable skills; and 4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events*.

In Lincoln County, the majority of respondents indicated that they reside in a rural area (77%) followed by farm (15%). Only 8 percent consider themselves to be urban residents. The majority (92%) indicated that they were white. Over half (69%) reported that as a child, s/he had been a member of 4-H. Only 39 percent of the respondents had never served as a volunteer 4-H

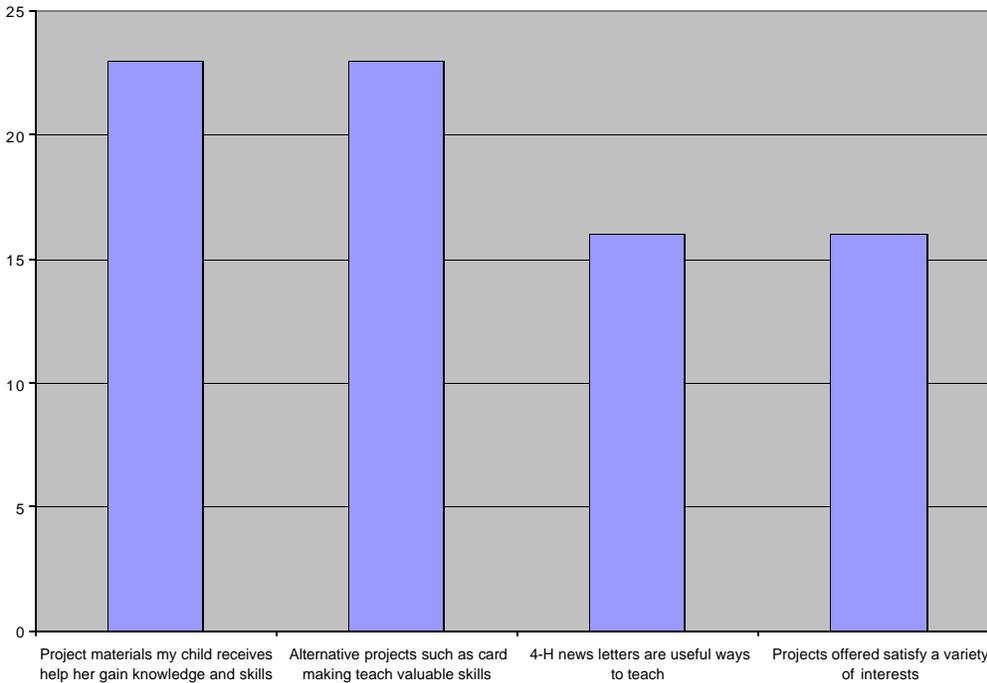
leader. Of those respondents who answered this question the average length of time served as a volunteer 4-H leader was 5 years.



Percent indicating Lincoln County 4-H has been “effective” or “highly effective”

	Percent Effective & Very Effective
The quality of adult leadership is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	85
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	69
Project materials my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to project	62
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	62
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	54
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	54
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	54
Lincoln County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Lincoln County	54
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	39
Alternative 4-H projects, such as card making, teach my child valuable skills	23

Most Frequently Rated "Ineffective or Highly Ineffective"



Percent indicating Lincoln County 4-H has been “ineffective” or “highly ineffective”

Percent Ineffective & Very Ineffective

Project materials my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project	23
Alternative 4-H projects, such as card making, teach my child valuable skills	23
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	16
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	16
The quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	15
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	8
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	8
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	8
Lincoln County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Lincoln County	8
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	0

Selected Survey Comments

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

- ✓ *They have a good soil and range program*
- ✓ *Soil judging, livestock clubs, 4-H camp*
- ✓ *The Extension Educator and leadership provided*
- ✓ *Fair exhibits*

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

- ✓ *Lack of organization in P.V., but we are aware that everybody is so busy*
- ✓ *Programs that duplicate programs offered by other sources, i.e. teach kids about drugs*
- ✓ *Programs related to large metropolitan programs and needs*
- ✓ *Lack of involvement of youth and leaders*
- ✓ *Leadership training is inadequate*
- ✓ *Lack of organized program*

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

- ✓ *Better organization in the P.V.*
- ✓ *More programs related to the community and area*
- ✓ *More recognition events*
- ✓ *Get an actual, organized meeting*

Conclusions

To summarize, a pilot assessment of the effectiveness of the management of Lincoln County 4-H indicates that the quality of volunteer leadership is key to the success of the program. Also indicated as effective is the attraction to children from diverse backgrounds, and the value of competitions and shows. There appears to a split in the opinion on the value of project materials as being helpful that may merit closer examination. Respondents expressed the apparent lack of value in alternative projects, such as card making, and questioned newsletters as valuable teaching tools.

Responding leaders and parents praised the Extension leadership, staff and the quality of their programming efforts. They do request additional organization in some geographic areas, additional training for leaders and increased responsibility for youth and adult leaders. Also suggested was additional recognition events.

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 4H

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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