



# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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## **Managing 4-H: What's Working and What's Not Based on a White Pine County Assessment**

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### **Introduction**

In 2002 4-H will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 White Pine 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 White Pine 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 71 survey recipients, 22 returned completed questionnaires, resulting in a 31 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

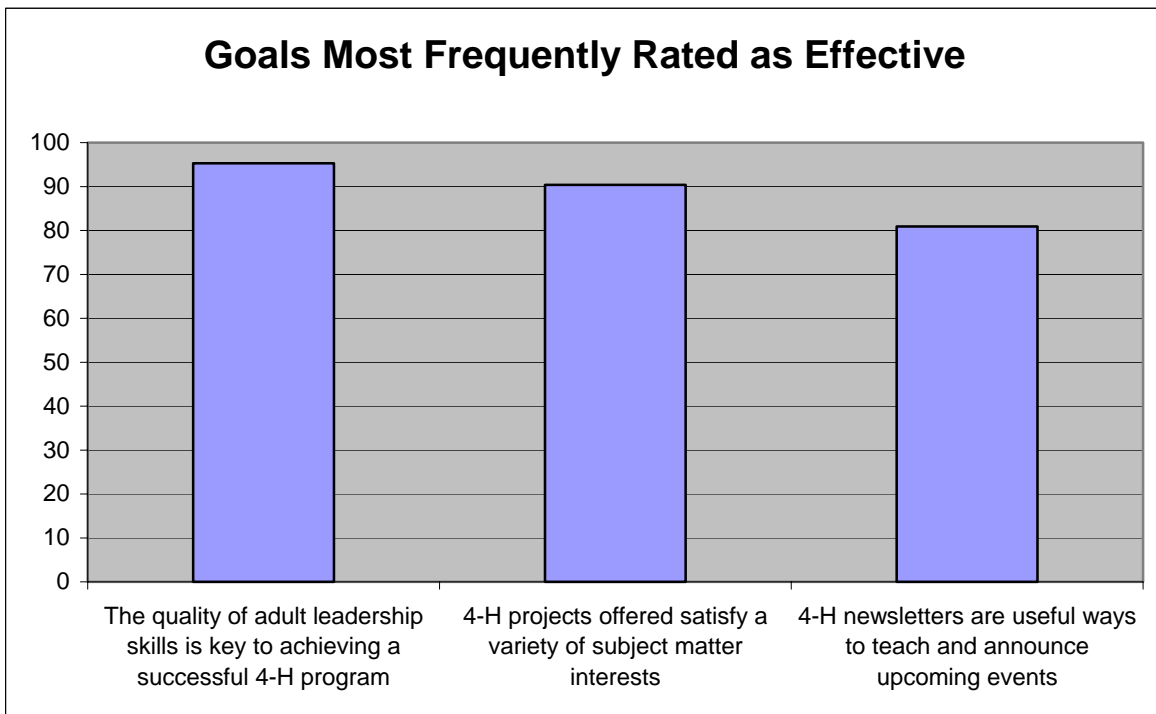
number that best indicates how effective 4-H is in achieving its management goals. Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate they “didn’t know.” The results were sorted into two groups by combining the highest ratings into one group and the lowest ratings into a second group.

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 White Pine County 4-H is “ineffective” and “very ineffective” are illustrated in Figure 2. The questions are listed below each bar graph illustrating percentage responses.

The management goal rated most frequently effective in White Pine County 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 projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests 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 White Pine County these include: *project materials received help to gain knowledge, skills related to a project, record book-keeping teaches valuable skills and 4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds*.

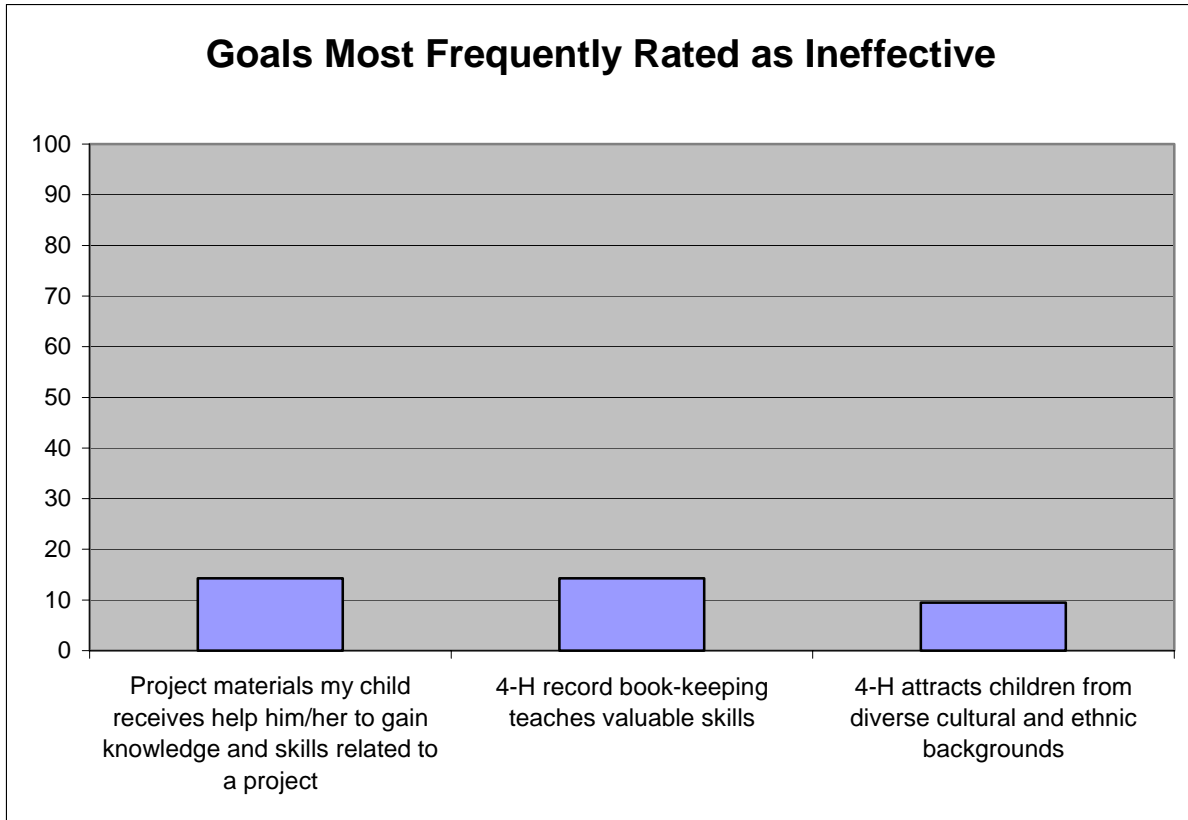
In White Pine County, the majority of respondents indicated they reside in a rural area (86%), followed by farm (10%). The majority of respondents (95%) indicated they were white. Approximately 71 percent reported that as a child, s/he had participated in 4-H, while 67 percent of the respondents had served as a volunteer leader. The average length of time served as a volunteer 4-H leader was 11 years.

Figure 1  
Goals rated by parents and volunteers as effective



Percent indicating White Pine 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	95
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	90
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	81
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	71
White Pine County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in White Pine County	71
Project materials my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project	67
Alternative 4-H projects, such as shooting sports, teach my child valuable skills	67
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	62
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	57
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	52

Figure 2  
Goals rated by parents and volunteers as ineffective



**Percent indicating White Pine 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	14
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	14
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	10

## Selected Survey Comments

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

- ✓ *The wide variety of interests, and the strong community service/involvement.*
- ✓ *There is always someone with answers to my questions.*
- ✓ *Appreciate the Extension Service and all staff work.*
- ✓ *Provides opportunities for my children that otherwise would not be available.*
- ✓ *Working with the members in my club and at other 4-H activities.*
- ✓ *The way everyone helps others get the job done.*
- ✓ *Good activities, good kids*

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

- ✓ *The level of parent participation.*
- ✓ *Sometimes it's hard to get to activities because of distance.*
- ✓ *It's lacking some in leaders with real knowledge and experience.*
- ✓ *Not enough training for certain areas of interest.*
- ✓ *Some areas it is completely up to kid and parents to educate.*
- ✓ *Sometimes a little lack of information and coordination.*

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

- ✓ *The sale day for the fair from Sunday to Saturday.*
- ✓ *I would like to see more community involvement.*
- ✓ *To encourage more children/parents to get involved in the program.*
- ✓ *Parent's attitudes.*
- ✓ *Not much - White Pine has an outstanding program compared to the rest of the state.*

## Conclusions

To summarize, an assessment of the effectiveness of the management of White Pine County 4-H indicates that the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program. However, there appears to be a critical need to improve project materials to help children gain knowledge and skills; to look at the skills learned from 4-H record book keeping; and to attract children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds to further strengthen White Pine County 4-H.

Additionally, respondents indicate that Cooperative Extension staff needs to improve leader recruitment, training and preparation. The assessment indicates that 4-H should strive to increase the involvement in 4-H of parents, youth, and community.

A statistical test for content validity and reliability of the pilot questionnaire was very high (.74), 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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