



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Managing 4-H: What's Working and What's Not Based on a Douglas 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 is being implemented in other counties in Nevada, including Douglas 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 Douglas 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 190 survey recipients, 33 returned completed questionnaires, resulting in a 17 percent response rate.

Results of the Assessment

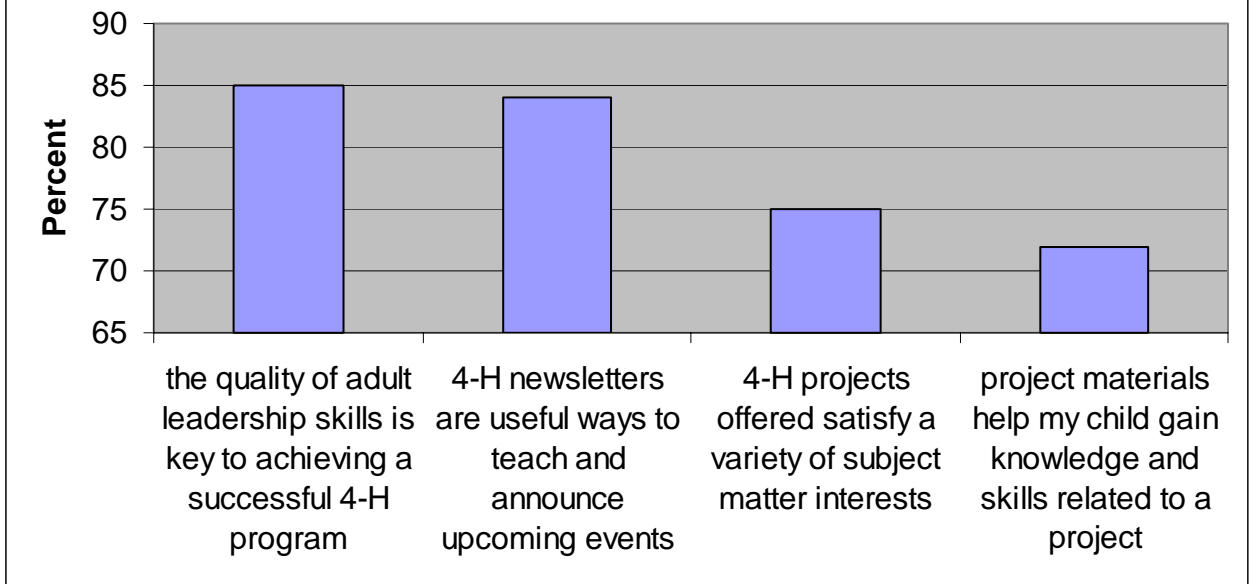
On a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” being “ineffective” and “5” being “very effective,” respondents were asked to circle the number that best indicates how effective 4-H is in achieving its management goals. Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate they “didn’t know.” The results were sorted into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

The management goal rated most frequently effective in Douglas 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 newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events, 4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests, and project materials help my child gain knowledge and skills related to a project*. Management goals that were rated as either ineffective or very ineffective indicate goals that are not being adequately reached and need improvement. In Douglas County these include: *Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects, and 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Douglas County*.

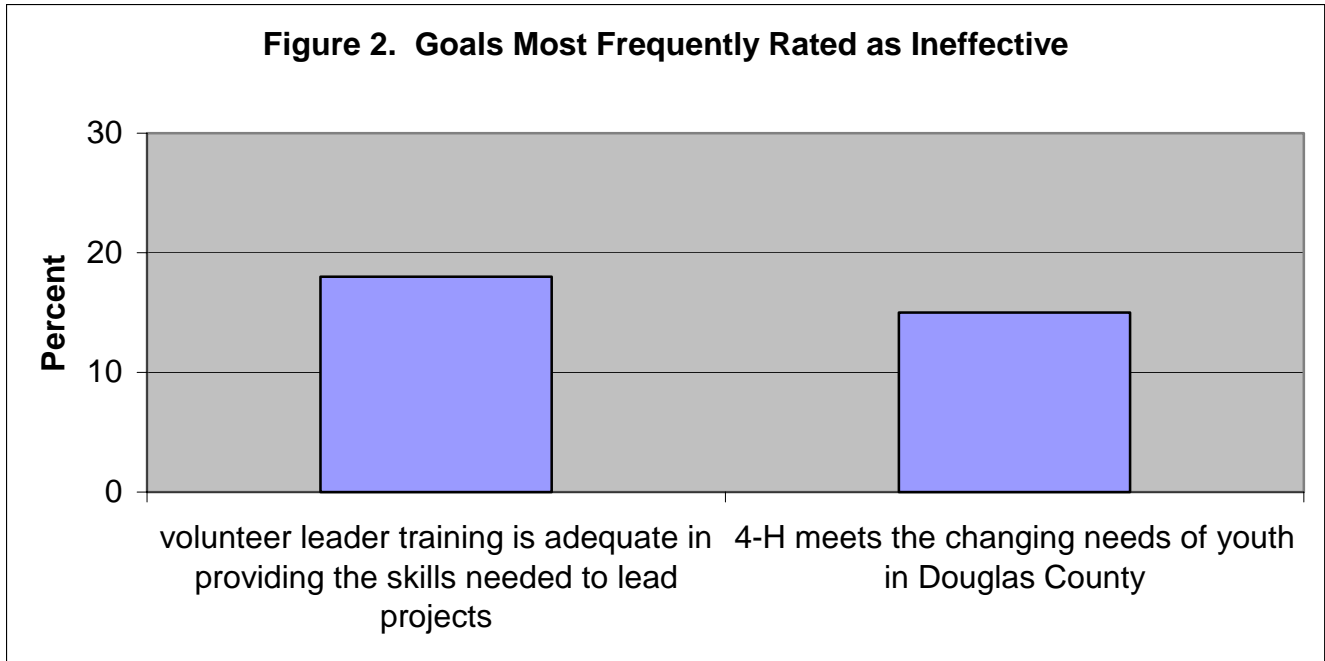
In Douglas County, the majority of respondents indicated they reside in a rural area (76%), followed by urban (14%) and farm (10%). The majority of respondents (97%) indicated they were white. Approximately 40 percent reported that as a child, s/he had participated in 4-H, while 12 percent of the respondents had served as a volunteer leader. The average length of time served as a volunteer 4-H leader was 5 years.

Figure 1. Goals Most Frequently Rated as Effective



Percent indicating effective	<u>Percent Effective</u>
the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	85
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	84
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	75
project materials help my child gain knowledge and skills related to a project	72
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	69
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	63
4-H portfolio-keeping teaches valuable skills	63
4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Douglas County	52
volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	42
alternative 4-H projects, such as skateboarding, teach my child valuable skills	36

Figure 2. Goals Most Frequently Rated as Ineffective



Percent indicating ineffective	<u>Percent Ineffective</u>
volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	18
4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Douglas County	15
the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	12
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	12
alternative 4-H projects, such as skateboarding, teach my child valuable skills	12
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	9
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	9
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	6
project materials help my child gain knowledge and skills related to a project	6
4-H portfolio-keeping teaches valuable skills	6

Selected Survey Comments

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

- *"The leaders' commitment to the kids, and their knowledge of what they are teaching."*
- *"4-H is a wonderful program that promotes and encourages my kids to become responsible, caring individuals."*
- *"Teaches good responsibility skills, good morals and good skills in interaction with others."*
- *"I appreciate that although many events we do not attend, we are always invited and reminded."*
- *"The group of parents that are involved in most of the events"*
- *"There are lots of events to participate in"*
- *"This is a wholesome club involving parents & children. It has kept a great line of communication between myself and my teenage daughter."*
- *"Excellent leaders."*
- *"My family roots, the beauty, the people."*
- *"The variety of clubs offered, leadership."*
- *"The Extension Office staff has consistently been friendly and helpful."*

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

- *"The lack of volunteers for more groups."*
- *"Not a lot of kids."*
- *"No enough on the calendar. Conflicts with other sports."*
- *"No leader training, maybe we could have training sessions/positive reinforcement time for the 4-H leaders."*
- *"It would be great if the results of horse shows, etc., were announced in the local newspaper. I rarely see 4-H mentioned."*
- *"Record books too complicated for younger kids."*
- *"The uniform but I know it is a big part of 4-H."*
- *"Clicks among members."*
- *Unorganized leader, lack of proficient leadership."*
- *"All the problems and conflicts."*

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

- *"I believe if you sign the code of conduct, you should have to abide by the rules."*
- *"Teaching social skills."*
- *"Have more club activities so students can meet each other."*
- *"I would drop names off of the membership list if there was no participation by an individual for more than 6 months (to make room for others)."*
- *Add a couple more clubs, visit schools with 4-Hers to advertise 4-H to get more kids."*

- *I know that leaders are hard to find but they are the ones that make or break up a 4-H group.”*
- *“I feel that special interests are met by individuals running the program.”*
- *“No leader training – maybe we could have training sessions/positive reinforcement time for the 4-H leaders.”*
- *“Portfolios.”*

Conclusions

To summarize, an assessment of the effectiveness of the management of Douglas County 4-H indicates that the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program. Also indicated as effective is 4-H newsletters are useful way to teach and announce upcoming events. However, there appears to be a critical need to have more leader training to further strengthen Douglas County 4-H. Additionally, respondents indicate that the 4-H program must be more effective in meeting the changing needs of youth in Douglas County.

A statistical test for content validity and reliability of the pilot questionnaire was very high (89%), 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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