



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Bringing the University to You

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Managing 4-H: What's Working and What's Not Based on Carson City and Storey Counties Assessments

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Introduction

In 2002 4-H celebrated 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 provided an opportunity 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, member 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. Since 2001, the survey has been implemented in twelve other counties in Nevada, including Carson City and Storey Counties. 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 management at multiple levels including:

- ✓ Management of adult volunteer leaders trained and supervised by program staff;

- ✓ Management of community 4-H clubs by adult volunteer leaders; and
- ✓ Management of 4-H programs countywide through supervision by Cooperative Extension staff including instructors, 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 Carson City and Storey Counties 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 150 survey recipients, 33 returned completed questionnaires, resulting in a 22 percent response rate.

Results of the Assessment

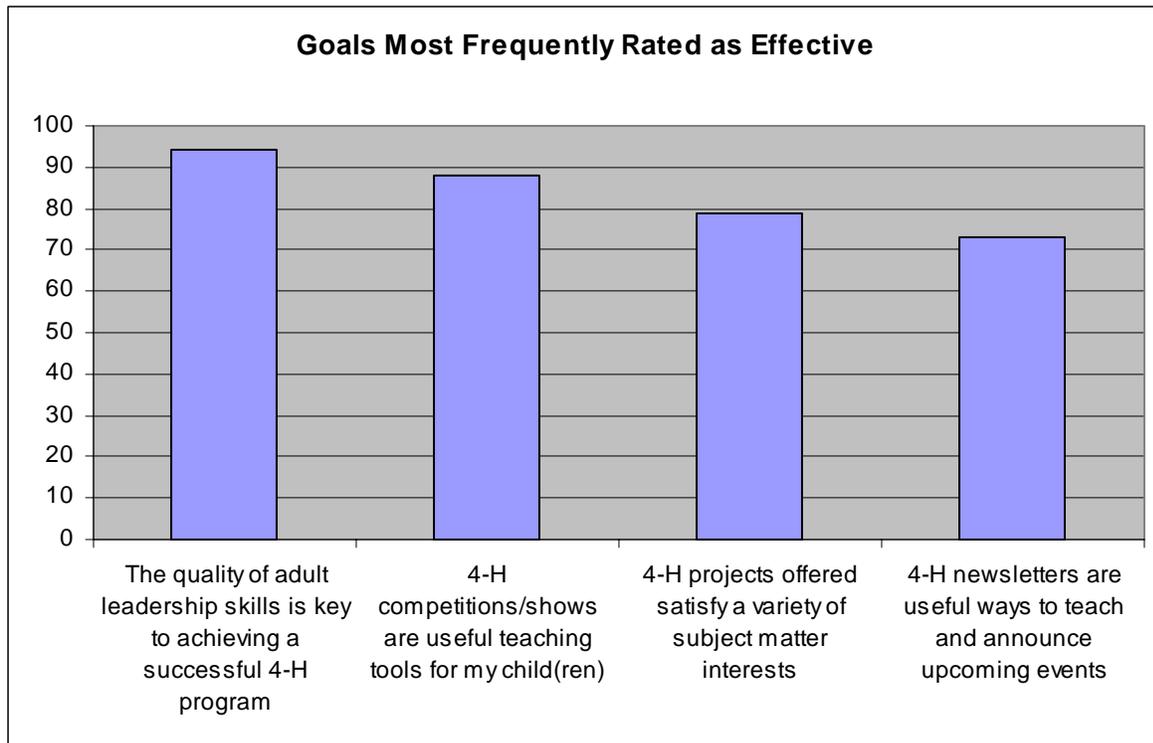
On a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” being “ineffective” and “5” being “very effective,” respondents were asked to circle the number that best indicates how effective 4-H is in achieving its management goals. Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate they “didn’t know.” The results were sorted into 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 Carson City and Storey Counties 4-H are “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 Carson City and Storey Counties 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 competition/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)*; *4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests*; *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 Carson City and Storey Counties these include: *alternative 4-H projects, such as snowboarding, teach my child valuable skills, and volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects*.

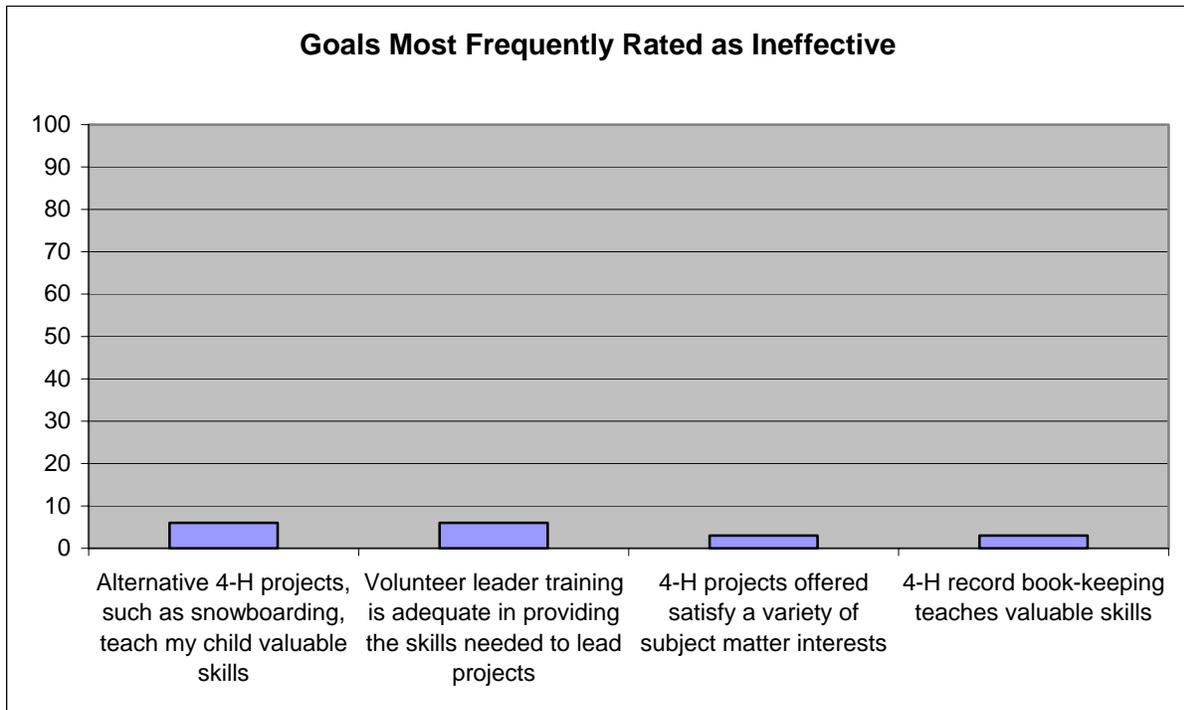
In Carson City and Storey Counties, the majority of respondents indicated they reside in a rural area (61%), followed by urban (36%). The majority of respondents (85%) indicated they were white. Approximately 27 percent reported that as a child, s/he had participated in 4-H, while 67 percent of the respondents had served as a volunteer leader. The average length of time served as a volunteer 4-H leader was 1 to 3 years.

Table 2
Goals rated by parents and volunteers as effective



Goals rated by parents and volunteers as effective	Percent Effective & Very Effectived
The quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program	94
4-H competitions/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren)	88
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	79
4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events	73
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	58
4-H attracts children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds	55
Alternative 4-H projects, such as snowboarding, teach my child valuable skills	55
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	49
Carson City/Storey County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Carson City/Storey County	39

Table 1
Goals rated by parents and volunteers as ineffective



Goals rated by parents and volunteers as ineffective	<u>Percent Ineffective & Very Ineffective</u>
Alternative 4-H projects, such as snowboarding, teach my child valuable skills	6
Volunteer leader training is adequate in providing the skills needed to lead projects	6
4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests	3
4-H record book-keeping teaches valuable skills	3
Carson City/Storey County 4-H meets the changing needs of youth in Carson City/Storey County	3

Selected Survey Comments

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

- ✓ *"The people"*
- ✓ *"The diversity of programs and adaptability"*
- ✓ *"Autonomy of individual clubs"*
- ✓ *"The summer camp"*
- ✓ *"Dedicated leaders"*

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

- ✓ *"The lack of funds"*
- ✓ *"Need a community club to be totally in tune with each other"*
- ✓ *"Not enough leaders are involved with leaders' council"*
- ✓ *"Not enough different clubs"*
- ✓ *"Not enough time or people to do it all; only a part-time extension person"*
- ✓ *"Not enough communication, find out about things too late"*

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

- ✓ *"I would like more kids to be excited about 4-H and the possibilities for clubs"*
- ✓ *"More active participation in home arts program and fair exhibits shown"*
- ✓ *"Add a community club"*
- ✓ *"The children should have to do more community service projects as a group"*
- ✓ *"More and varied programs and clubs"*
- ✓ *"More leader training"*
- ✓ *"More public relations in schools and community"*
- ✓ *"Less rules"*
- ✓ *"Become a little more organized, or simply communicate better"*
- ✓ *"Update teaching materials, give leaders something to work with"*
- ✓ *"Planning"*

Conclusions

To summarize, an assessment of the effectiveness of the management of Carson City/Storey County 4-H indicates that the quality of adult leadership skills is key to achieving a successful 4-H program. Also indicated as effective are 4-H competition/shows are useful teaching tools for my child(ren); 4-H projects offered satisfy a variety of subject matter interests; 4-H newsletters are useful ways to teach and announce upcoming events; and project materials my child receives help him/her to gain knowledge and skills related to a project. However, there appears to be a critical need to change how 4-H teaches and announces upcoming events and improve outreach to children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds to further strengthen Carson City/Storey County 4-H.

Additionally, respondents indicate that Cooperative Extension staff needs to improve planning and communication with leaders and do more recruiting of both leaders and youth. The assessment indicates that 4-H should strive harder to bring a wider variety of programs and clubs to Carson City and Storey County youth.

A statistical test for content validity and reliability of the pilot questionnaire was 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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