



National Framework for 4-H Volunteerism

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Purpose of the Framework

The purpose of the **National Framework for 4-H Volunteerism** is to communicate and guide decisions and actions related to volunteerism across the 4-H system. The framework highlights common, but complex, themes related to 4-H volunteerism in which leadership from national, state and local 4-H programs each plays a critical role. The National Framework for 4-H Volunteerism reflects a number of important societal trends, current literature in the field of volunteerism and suggests key themes that, if addressed, will lead to a quality youth development program.

Vision: Quality volunteer systems connect young people with caring adults leading to positive outcomes for youth.

Mission:

- **Advance** knowledge about volunteer development and its contribution to meeting the needs of young people
- **Build** the capacity of professional staff and volunteers in creating safe, sustainable and vibrant learning environments for young people
- **Foster** innovative systems to engage volunteers and prepare them for voluntary action in 4-H and in their communities

Target Audience

The National Framework for 4-H Volunteerism has been developed for all levels of leadership who have responsibility for administering and implementing 4-H volunteer development programs. State Extension directors and administrators, 4-H program leaders and specialists, area and county educators and supervisory staff are encouraged to use the document as a key resource to:

- Communicate the value and changing roles of volunteers in the 4-H system
- Stimulate discussion about volunteerism as a field of scientific endeavor and the scholarship, education and service associated with 4-H volunteer development programs
- Foster the effective engagement of volunteers in quality 4-H youth development programs

Underlying Philosophy

The underlying philosophy of 4-H youth development and volunteer development are acknowledged below and are consistent with the themes and recommendations in the National Framework for 4-H Volunteerism.

- 4-H relies, indeed thrives, on the strong ethic of volunteerism.
- Quality youth development programming occurs in 4-H because of strong partnerships with dedicated and caring volunteers.
- A comprehensive volunteer system includes both the management of volunteer resources and the development of individuals participating in the 4-H youth development program.
- The active preparation, training, and involvement of volunteers enhance the credibility and integrity of 4-H.
- There is an expressed commitment to the involvement of youth and adult volunteers as partners.
- There is recognition that volunteering is a two-way process, benefiting both volunteers and the 4-H youth development program.
- Organizations, like Cooperative Extension, in which volunteer development is recognized as a profession, significantly benefit from volunteer involvement.
- Contemporary research identifies specific competencies and capacities needed by volunteer program managers for the effective and efficient management of volunteer systems.
- The 4-H Professional Research Knowledge and Competencies (4-H PRKC, 2004) are a key resource for the preparation and training of professional staff in volunteer management.

Core Elements of the Framework

The Core Elements of the Framework capture the essence of stakeholder input, current research, and trends in the field of volunteerism. They can be interpreted as standards, strategic themes or goals to strive for in 4-H volunteer efforts in the coming years. They include five elements: Creating Safe Environments, Engaging Volunteers, Administering Volunteer Management Systems, Benefits of Volunteering, and Strengthening Partnerships.

Creating Safe Environments

Volunteers, through training and experience, create safe environments for themselves and youth program participants.

- Screening, training and experience when practiced consistently, create safe environments for volunteers and youth
- Standardized core orientation concepts are utilized throughout the country.
- Standards of behavior for youth participants and adult volunteers are visible components of the planned program.
- National and state risk management strategies, including handling finances, insurance, and best practices in working with youth, are clearly communicated to all stakeholders.
- Age appropriate activities demonstrate an understanding of youth development and provide a foundation for volunteers to effectively, safely engage youth.

Engaging Volunteers

Volunteer management systems are responsive to the contemporary challenges and attributes of today's volunteers.

- Recruitment and retention strategies are purposeful in reaching beyond traditional demographics to demonstrate organizational readiness to welcome and engage a diverse cadre of volunteers.
- Volunteer roles are adaptable to meet needs of diverse volunteers while supporting quality youth development programs.
- Engaged volunteers mirror the populations eligible for participation in 4-H programs.
- The impact of generational and/or cultural characteristics and strategies for managing modern 4-H programs are understood and applied.
- Innovative communication and teaching methods are used for volunteers and youth to discover, share and learn together. This includes technology, ACCESS 4-H, and the collective power of the internet.
- Professional staff members are knowledgeable of and intentionally engaged in creating volunteer programs reflective of current trends in volunteerism.

Administering Volunteer Management Systems

Extension staff members administer effective 4-H volunteer management systems, successfully engaging a cadre of diverse volunteers to deliver quality programs.

- Extension staff recognizes themselves, and are recognized by their supervisors, as volunteer educators and program managers.
- Professional staff members are knowledgeable of and intentionally engaged in creating volunteer programs reflective of current trends in volunteerism.
- Training and resources are available for Extension staff members to gain skills and confidence in building volunteer capacity.
- National resources are developed and/or identified to support state and local Extension staff members to prepare themselves and their volunteers.
- Systems are in place to assist in managing risks, liabilities and conflicts related to volunteers and their involvement in 4-H youth development.
- Orientation of new Extension staff includes resources to utilize in developing and expanding the local volunteer delivery system

Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteers develop knowledge and skills while benefiting personally from their involvement in accomplishing the mission of the 4-H program

- Research, such as the Volunteer Research Knowledge and Competencies (4-H VRKC) is utilized to build effective training and education programs for the benefit of volunteers.
- Ongoing, continuing education programs provide personal development opportunities for volunteers to increase knowledge and skills.
- Leadership opportunities are developed to allow for the advancement of volunteers into positions of greater responsibility and personal benefit.
- Middle management volunteers are valued, trained and utilized to extend the reach of 4-H programs in their communities.
- Volunteers are appropriately recognized for their personal development achievements as well as for program achievements, not merely for years of service.

Strengthening Partnerships

Partnerships that engage volunteers, meet the needs and interests of young people and reinforce the positive image of 4-H are strengthened.

- Engaged advisory systems serve as partners in local programs to support and enhance 4-H programs.
- Active participation with professional associations and organizations targeting volunteer administrators will increase professional staff members' capacities as volunteer program managers.
- Collaborations with foundations, corporations, organizations, and additional audiences, both formal and informal, create new opportunities for volunteers and contribute to current and potential program efforts for 4-H youth.

Critical Relationships and Considerations

The Framework also describes how the core elements are related in critical ways to each other or to those that administer and implement 4-H volunteer development programs. There are many complementary as well as competing relationships that impact the implementation of the National Framework for 4-H Volunteerism. Here are some of the most critical relationships and considerations:

- The way in which volunteer management and volunteer development are viewed by Extension administration plays a pivotal role in how 4-H programs are valued and delivered.
- The way in which volunteerism is viewed and how volunteers are involved in the program reflect the values, beliefs and expertise of the individuals and groups leading the 4-H program. Paid staff and key volunteers serve as gatekeepers of the 4-H program and their positive or negative perspectives can impact the total program.
- Supervisory staff can strongly influence how a 4-H educator administers the local 4-H program.
- County advisory groups sometimes support and reward a traditional approach to 4-H programming that makes recruiting and involving a cadre of diverse volunteers or integrating new forms of volunteerism into the 4-H program more challenging.
- Volunteers stay engaged when sustainable structures are in place, in both program management and in volunteer development.
- Involving volunteers across all ages presents challenges and benefits. It is critical that Extension staff be knowledgeable and adjust the way they work with volunteers across the generations.
- Patterns of volunteer engagement have shifted from long-term involvement to shorter-term, episodic engagement. Extension staff must be prepared to accommodate this reality in considering program design and delivery strategies.
- Digital and social media is transforming how young people communicate and interact with one another and will impact their relationships with adult volunteers.
- Growing relationships between the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents, eXtension and ACCESS4-H will dramatically impact how we deliver educational content, prepare and interact with current and prospective volunteers, and manage 4-H volunteer systems.
- Individuals and associations that contribute to the field of volunteer management are critical partners in addressing contemporary issues and challenges.

Implementation and Next Steps

Defining national direction and building capacity in 4-H volunteerism requires more than a framework; it also requires an intentionality that builds on existing systems.

Implementation will begin by:

- Broadly communicating and promoting the framework to internal and external stakeholders,
- Involving stakeholders in creating action steps and milestones for each core element,
- Developing reliable and valid measures to assess impact related to the framework,
- Reinforcing ongoing efforts in states and Extension regions that address the core elements in the framework,
- Supporting the ongoing work of the National Learning Priorities Team on Volunteer Development for the Next Generation in the preparation of professional staff, and
- Clarifying the roles and relationships of national, state and county 4-H leadership in jointly accomplishing the strategy.

Appendix A: References and Resources

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Appendix B: Glossary

Volunteers—Adults or teens who contribute time to the promotion, organization, assistance or leadership of an organization without receiving payment for services rendered (USDA, 1990). Another definition provides four tenets of volunteering as: active involvement; uncoerced or given freely; not primarily for remuneration; and acting on the common good (Safrit & Merrill, 1996). For purposes of this framework, volunteers are defined as individuals who contribute to attainment of the organization’s mission through service or leadership without primary consideration of financial gain.

Volunteer Program Managers—Individual(s) within organizations whose primary work is to provide leadership/management to, and foster an environment for effectively engaging volunteers. Many different titles are assigned to these types of positions, the terms “volunteer resource manager” and “administrator of volunteer programs” may also be used.

County Extension Advisory Boards or Councils—Entities that provide opportunities for local citizen involvement in planning, implementing and evaluating the County Extension educational program. Groups vary from state to state in terms of their responsibility and authority, with some function with fiduciary responsibility to include hiring and termination of Extension staff while others serve in a purely advisory capacity.

Extension Staff— Professional staff that have responsibility for volunteer development. While titles and position descriptions vary widely generally State-level Staff/Specialist typically has statewide job expectations. Area/Regional/District Specialists usually have geographically-determined responsibilities for 4-H, supporting agents, volunteers and leaders through teaching, program development, implementation and evaluation. County or parish agent/advisor/educator typically work in one or several local jurisdictions providing program leadership, program management and development, and evaluation locally (Astroth, 2007).

National 4-H Learning Priorities 2007 -2012—National 4-H Learning Priorities, led by National 4-H Headquarters and funded by National 4-H Council, focus on critical professional development opportunities for 4-H staff that will enhance program quality which leads to positive outcomes for young people and improves the long-term success of 4-H. Volunteer Development for the Next Generation is one of the identified priorities.

Appendix C: Planning Process

A deliberative and inclusive planning process was followed in developing the National Framework for 4-H Volunteerism. In November 2007, a small group of volunteer experts were convened to explore the idea of creating and recommending a national strategy for 4-H volunteer development. In February 2008, twelve facilitators conducted 10 group interviews through Breeze teleconferencing over a period of three weeks. More than 110 participants including Extension directors, state program leaders, state specialists, district specialists, and county educators/agents from 40 states and territories, participated in these group interviews.

Participants discussed responses to a series of six posed questions:

- 1) Please describe your current volunteer development program in 4-H.
- 2) How do we create and maintain a volunteer development structure that provides meaningful experiences for volunteers and contributes to the mission of 4-H?
- 3) Given the current trends and research in volunteerism across the United States, what are some of the key implications for 4-H?
- 4) What would be some new roles and opportunities for volunteers in 4-H youth development?
- 5) What would be the top three professional development needs of staff related to volunteer development?
- 6) If you were to propose one key idea for consideration in the national 4-H strategy, what would it be?

Facilitators transcribed notes from the group interviews and submitted these notes for compilation. The compiled notes were analyzed utilizing NVivo 8 qualitative research software by one researcher. The compilations were also forwarded to four subject matter experts who reviewed the information to identify themes within the notes. The subject matter experts' responses were compared to the NVivo 8 results for confirmation, validating the findings.

A panel of 10 thought leaders convened in June 2008 and included volunteer consultants, internal and external specialists, and other subject matter experts. They reviewed the findings from the group interviews, overlaying their specific knowledge of the field of volunteer administration, and recommended strategies and suggestions. The inputs were incorporated into the National 4-H Volunteer Strategy draft. In July 2008, the draft was vetted across the 4-H system with internal stakeholders including state program leaders, volunteer specialists, county educators, and volunteers. Two feedback forums were held using Breeze/Connect teleconferencing attracting approximately 30 people. During the feedback forum, it suggested that the document be approached as a framework for 4-H volunteerism rather than a strategy. The input from the feedback forums were considered and incorporated into the draft. The document was vetted a final time with the feedback forum participants only. Comments were received from 10 people, which was considered and included in the current document.

It is recommended that the next phase of the work be to continue to engage stakeholders in discussions and determine strategies for addressing the core elements identified of the framework.

Appendix D: Acknowledgements

Co-Chairs: Barbara Stone, National 4-H Headquarters and Harriett Edwards, NC State University

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Thought Leaders: Rebecca Bankhead, DC; Kitty Burcsu, OH; Paul Coreil, LA; Dale Leidheiser, CO; Sue Pleskac, WI; Sheri Seibold; IL; David Styers, BoardSource; Todd Tarifa, LA; Mary Jo Williams, MO; Mary Kay Hood, IN.

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