

4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

Building a Volunteer Leadership System

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Building a volunteer leadership system is vital to a successful 4-H program. Individuals who are aware of 4-H youth development discover that 4-H provides what they want and need for their children. The motivation to be part of a leadership team is rooted in mutual goals for themselves and their children.

Strategy for Leadership Development

The club leader plans for (or helps the 4-H club team to plan for) a leadership system which makes the wisest use of the human resources available to the club. A strategy for leadership development should provide for the following functions:

1. Creating and maintaining awareness of the mission of 4-H youth development
2. Choosing to share leadership roles
3. Carefully defining leadership jobs and planning to distribute them evenly among 4-H families
4. Inviting an adult to consider a job
5. Matching the person with the job
6. Planning together to accomplish the job
7. Providing necessary training
8. Providing necessary resources

9. Maintaining good communication
10. Providing regular feedback
11. Providing recognition
12. Providing for personal growth and opportunities for more responsible leadership positions

Let's look at each of the functions of a systematic approach to leadership development:

Mission

1. *Creating and maintaining awareness of the mission of 4-H youth development*

The mission or purpose of 4-H attracts persons to the program and provides the larger goals around which they gather and toward which they work together. The 4-H club team can promote understanding of human development through informal education by:

- Interpreting 4-H to all families of 4-H members
- Helping each family feel a part of the 4-H club
- Interpreting the need for volunteer leaders in 4-H
- Interpreting the 4-H youth development program to the local community



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Shared Leadership

2. *Choosing to share leadership roles*

Team building begins with the decision to share leadership. Sharing leadership is not always easy to do. Another person may do the job differently than the team leader wishes or not follow through on a job which has been accepted. The leader of the team who chooses to share leadership takes a risk. By trusting others, the leader bets that the other person will follow through with the job accepted and will find satisfaction and growth in doing so. The leader bets that the club will be stronger for having a broader base of leadership.

The leader of the team who shares leadership will seek to know and become friends with all the families of the club. The parent willingness questionnaire entitled "Sure I'd Like to Help" is a good source of information. Parents might be asked to fill this out early in the year. These might be kept on file for quick reference as help is needed during the year.

Members of the 4-H team may help each other to get acquainted with families. Inviting guests for coffee, for dinner or a picnic, or visiting the home of a new or inactive family may help to build relationships.

Job Description

3. *Carefully defining leadership jobs and planning to distribute them evenly among 4-H families*

What jobs does your 4-H club need to have done?

The answer to the question will depend on the size of the club, the kind of program which is planned and the ages of the 4-H members. All clubs must have officers and adult leaders.

Small clubs may organize themselves very simply; one person may do several jobs. Larger clubs have more jobs and different kinds of jobs to be done. A more complex program creates more jobs.

It is important to distribute the jobs evenly among the families of your 4-H club. "Doing my share" of the leadership jobs is part of belonging to the club. Try to give each family one major responsibility; then distribute the smaller jobs as evenly as possible.

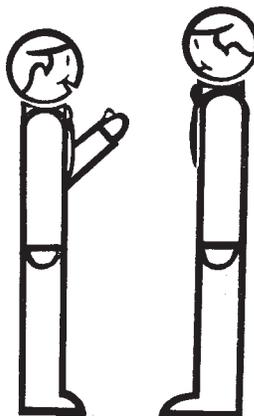
Recruitment

4. *Inviting an adult to consider a job*

A person who has chosen to accept a job will be much more committed to doing it well. Giving the person a choice begins with personal contact. The person-to-person, one-to-one approach is the most effective way of asking! The primary leadership roles (organizational leader, project leader) will usually be taken by persons who are active in the club program and familiar with 4-H. These contacts may be made:

- In a meeting, such as a planning meeting with parents
- During a visit to the home, especially for the positions which have the most responsibility and require the most time
- By a written note with a follow-up telephone call

Here are some clues for talking with a potential volunteer about a job which needs to be done:



- a. Greet the person as a friend; show interest in the individual as a person.
- b. Know essential information about 4-H and the job; be prepared for questions.
- c. Tell the person why the job is important.
- d. Help the person see the challenge of the job and feel that the job is one which he/she can do.
- e. Help the person see how the job will benefit his/her child, his/her family, members of the 4-H club or the local community.
- f. Give clear, reasonable job expectations using a written job description, being clear about the amount of time required and beginning and ending dates.
- g. Match the person with the job (see No. 5 later).
- h. Let the person know what kinds of training, resources and support are available.

- i. When the person is ready, ask for a decision. This might come with the first contact, or the person might like to think about it for a few days. If so, call or come back later.
- j. If the person says “Yes,” involve him/her as soon as possible in that role in the 4-H program. A person “coming in” might work for a short period with the person “going out” in order to help while learning the job.
- k. Follow up the initial contact as appropriate. A letter or a visit will keep commitments firm and expectations high.

Placement

5. *Matching the person with the job*

A person is more likely to enjoy, perform well and grow in a job which matches personal needs and interests. When a person has indicated interest in a leadership role, it is wise to talk about the job, the interests and skills of the person, and the time the person can give to the 4-H club program.

- A job description written ahead of time can be used to clarify what the club needs to have done.
- The potential volunteer leader should be encouraged to think about personal skills and choose a job which is comfortable and which makes sense to the volunteer.

Involvement

6. *Planning together to accomplish the job*

The person who says “Yes” needs to join the team as soon as possible. Bring the new volunteer into the team process while interest is high. The new volunteer can help with planning, can “understudy” the person who is completing the job for the current year and can begin to get acquainted with team members and resources.

Training

7. *Providing necessary training*

The most valuable form of training takes place among members of the team. A person who has performed a job will help to orient a person taking that job for the first time. Printed materials and

records may be given to the new person. The retiring leader may remain “on call” for guidance or assistance as needed. A great deal of the wisdom about leadership in 4-H is shared by experienced volunteer leaders who continue to work with the programs.

Training for 4-H leadership skills is provided by county Extension faculty, state 4-H faculty and subject matter specialists. Your county Extension agent will tell you when these training sessions occur. Be sure that new members of your team are especially encouraged to attend; a new team member might like to ride with you to the training. County Extension agents may also meet with your team, if requested, for a local training session.

Resources

8. *Providing necessary resources*

The new leader will need to know where to turn for personal support and where to find resources with which to do the job. Bulletins and printed information are available from the county Extension office. Extension agents can order audiovisuals for your use (at no charge) from Media Services of the Cooperative Extension Service.

Be sure that appropriate fact sheets in this handbook are shared with other members of the leadership team. Specific fact sheets can be obtained through your county Extension office or by going to the Extension website, www.uaex.edu.

Communication

9. *Maintaining good communication*

A good flow of information is essential. Communication is the key to successful teamwork.

Information can be shared by phone, by newsletter and by printed announcements which 4-H members take home after each meeting.

It also helps for the full team to meet regularly for planning and “checking signals.”

Feedback

10. *Providing regular feedback*

Each of us needs to know how things are going. If things are going well, a bit of recognition provides encouragement. If things are not going so well, sharing the situation with another may help to generate new insights and alternatives. Feedback may occur:

- Through one-to-one conversations with another leader
- Through conversations with the team
- By asking members how things are going
- By using check sheets such as “Looking at Our Club”
- By looking at goals, objectives and criteria which the club has set for itself

It is important to identify strengths and successes first, and then plan for changes which are desired.

Recognition

11. Providing recognition

Recognition is the team’s way of saying “Thank You.” It may be a simple statement of appreciation or a formal recognition of a larger job which has been completed. Recognition may be conveyed by a smile, a hand clasp, a card, a note from 4-H members, a letter, a cup of coffee, a flower, a party, a banner, a pin or a trophy. Any item significant to the person can be used to say “Thank You” and “We Care.”

Recognition should be a part of each meeting. To celebrate success helps the whole club feel good about “being 4-H.”

Advancement

12. Providing for personal growth and opportunities for more responsible leadership positions

A person who assumes a leadership role will develop confidence and leadership skills. Personal growth is part of the team process. A person can be placed in an apprentice role to learn skills which are desired. When skills have been practiced and mastered, that person can be given a more responsible leadership role. Experienced and skilled volunteer leaders can teach new leaders coming into the 4-H system.

The organizational leader is responsible for managing the process by which volunteer leaders are helped to become members of the 4-H team. Each club will use the parts of this process which meet the needs of that club.

The major objective is to divide leadership responsibilities into reasonable segments and involve people through their interests and based on their abilities.

This material was reprinted for use in Arkansas from material prepared by Faye Caskey, Agriculture Extension Service, University of Minnesota. It is an adaptation for 4-H club leadership of the paper, “A Systematic Approach to Leadership Development,” by Dr. V. Milton Boyce. This paper outlines the ISOTURE format (identification, selection, orientation, training, utilization, recognition and evaluation) for a leadership development process. Updated by Diane F. Jones, Ed.D., retired Extension family and consumer sciences specialist.

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