



Tri-State 4-H Club Growth and Expansion Retreat

January 23-24, 2007

Executive Summary

Need

The 4-H club program holds the best promise of reaching our positive youth development goals in that it has both the context of youth development coupled with the content of the land-grant university system knowledge. Increasing club membership is a national goal that Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin have adopted. In order to achieve our goals we need to use the wisdom and resources available to do this.

Purpose

- Share, support and grow each state's vision for 4-H Club growth & expansion;
- Learn from each state's experiences so that individually and/or collectively each state's agenda is advanced;
- Discover common interests that would advance the work and make wise use of scarce resources;
- Apply learnings from the retreat to specific applications within each state; and
- To identify any multi-state outcomes that could include: commitments to share tools, staff development, media pieces, etc. and interstate work teams on specific needs/tasks

Process

Thirty-one selected Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Staff members met on January 23-24, 2007. The meeting was held at the Kahler Hotel, Rochester Minnesota. Three tracks identified by the Planning Committee as methods to expand the 4-H club program were: *Partnerships Recruitment/Marketing Retention*

Participants were assigned tracks prior to attending the meeting and given a set of readings identified for each track in preparation. For each track, participants shared their state's current situation, developed definitions to create common language concerning the track methods, identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), identified strategies to move forward and created action plans.

Results

All three state's participants felt strongly that their first priority was to ensure that all club experiences are of high quality; this was coined "The Green Guarantee." Each state also committed to sharing resources through a tri-state portal so each state could benefit from both the state's individual work and tri-state efforts. In addition, top priority actions to address gaps were identified within each track.

➤ **Partnerships**

Addressing the potential for forming and sustaining partnerships as a method of engaging new young people and volunteers in 4-H clubs and club-like programs.

- Gaps: Do we have the data to share with policy makers and potential partners the value of 4-H to youth, the community and to them? Can we connect 4-H in terms of value to the community? Are staff and volunteers merit/reward system can be developed that encourages risks/failures in the system in regards to developing partnerships?
- Strategies
 - Twenty-six strategies were identified under the following categories: Identification of Partners, Education for Key Policy Makers, Human and Financial Resources, Staff Training/Tools, and Merit System.
- Top Priority Actions Identified for Tri-State Effort
 1. Develop/refine tools and training so 4-H staff will be better equipped to develop partnerships that will expand the 4-H experiences to new audiences.
 2. Explore a research study measuring the 4-H club contribution to communities in order to assist staff in helping the public understand why growing the club program is a worthy endeavor.

➤ **Recruitment/Marketing**

Addressing the systems and supports that recruit 4-H members.

- Gaps: What data should we collect in order to better serve new families who are recruited to the 4-H program? Are staff and volunteers prepared to "make the ask" when it comes to recruiting new families into our 4-H program? Should Extension employ an overall marketing strategy when it comes to new member recruitment? Which comes first, the new volunteers or the new members? How does our 4-H system simplify the processes and paperwork so that it is "easier" to be a 4-H member?

- Strategies
 - Forty-nine strategies were identified under the following categories: Increased Technology, Use of Alumni, Recruitment/Marketing Planning Committee/Process, Clientele as Recruiters, Marketing—Tangible Tools, Tailoring Opportunities for Volunteers, National Spokesperson, Training in Sales/Asking, Utilize College Students, Miscellaneous
- Top Priority Actions Identified for Tri-State Effort
 1. Explore professional assistance/internal expertise/funds/willingness to share marketing pieces to extend the resources of all three state 4-H programs through a formal shared agreement with each state program leader.
 2. Review and design a targeted marketing strategy. Hold focus groups to assess the impact of marketing pieces and recruitment endeavors on the client.
 3. Design and train staff in sales/making the ask. Resources for training identified are: Steve McCurley as a speaker and reprinting *4-H PR: Blueprint for Expansion*.

➤ Retention

Building the systems and supports that retain 4-H club members.

- Gaps: Do we have a standard way to measure 4-H member retention rates? Is there a benefit to measure this consistently? What are the factors that are affecting youth retention rates? Why do strategies to strengthen the 4-H club seem to be cyclic and still not made an impact on retention? Some states have gone to standardized 4-H club support tools (i.e., Family guides, required volunteer training, etc.). What results have happened as a result of this work? In recognition of the changing volunteering patterns, family needs, and youth needs, how can we better meet the needs of new 4-H members and families?
- Strategies
 - Fifty-five strategies were identified under the following categories: New Member Focus, Technology and Websites, Understanding Why Youth Leave (Assessment), Customer Service, Training Volunteers, Structure and Flexibility, Diversity, Paid staff training, Project and Activity Support, Youth Focused and Driven, Collaboration, Recruitment and Promotion
- Top Priority Actions Identified for Tri-State Effort
 1. Create a training plan for paid and volunteer staff focused on customer service: The train the trainer approach is targeted
 2. Provide and evaluate resources to support new families and members by: sharing a host of current statewide resources from all three states on the web site; focus on new family mentoring; transition clover buds and parents to a club setting; and creating a new 4-H Family orientation plan.
 3. Assess each state and counties data collection methods and further survey parent and members on why youth leave.

Evaluation

Overwhelmingly the participants were in strong agreement that this opportunity gave them greater depth to their discussion/review of the issues and stimulated a high level of strategy setting for 4-H Club Growth and Expansion. Participants and program directors reported a strong commitment to share tools, staff development and media pieces as a result of the experience.

Next Steps

Staffs from the three states are committed to the actions steps outlined in this report. A portal is now available for participants to share working documents, research, reports and plans with participants. Trainings are being planned and developed by tri-state participants on 4-H partnerships and volunteer retention and recruitment. The NC Region State 4-H Directors have begun exploration of a research project with the North Central Region Center for Rural Development to measure 4-H clubs contributions to their communities. States are applying what was learned from the Tri-state meetings to further their own agendas and staffs, who have previously not made connections before, are working together on important projects to expand the club program.

The complete proceedings of the Tri-State Meeting is located at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4H/Documents/TriStateReport.pdf>

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