

4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

Training Volunteers

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Effective leader training furthers not only the growth and maintenance of the 4-H program but also the personal development of each volunteer. Present leader training so that each volunteer feels it will contribute not only to success on the job but also to his/her personal growth. As a leader with responsibilities for the organizational aspects of the 4-H group, you will sometimes be involved in leader training. Be sure to coordinate your plans with the Extension agent in your county.

Designing Curricula

We need updated curricula for training volunteer 4-H leaders if 4-H is to serve increasing numbers of youth in the future. Volunteer 4-H leaders need to be recruited from a more diverse population as the 4-H membership becomes more diverse. There are several additional factors to consider when designing a training curriculum.

Educational and Experience Levels of the Leaders – Vary the content and kind of training with the educational level and experience of the leader. Some leaders like highly structured training; others prefer more self-directed learning. All new volunteers need training and information about the 4-H organization, its purpose, mode of operation and the relationship of the people involved. The fact sheet “This Is 4-H” will be helpful.

More Mobile Population – Shorter leader tenure, along with an increasing number of intensive, short-term programs, demands that leaders become effective in a short time. We need to train more leaders to maintain such a program. Long-term apprenticeship or on-the-job training is not practical or possible for many leaders.

Customs and Traditions – Know and consider the customs and traditions of the leaders, the members and the community as you develop curricula.

Curricula Must Be Relevant – Consider individual and group needs of both leaders and members as you plan curricula. Training must equip leaders to succeed immediately in the tasks they undertake. They need to know both the “how” and the “what” to teach. Involve leaders in selecting a curriculum for themselves.

Learning Climate

A good learning climate for adults will:

- Involve them in planning training content.
- Focus on the problems they want answered.
- Have volunteers help set the training objectives.



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- Build a climate of warmth, support and acceptance.
- Let adults help set the learning pace.
- Foster ties between leaders.
- Present the most important information first.

Beginning Leaders

New leaders need orientation to the organization and the specific program they will work with. They want to know how to work effectively with their groups, how to plan and implement a program, how to involve parents, how to obtain resources and facilities and what support is available to do their jobs. Short-term leaders primarily need to know the purpose of their jobs and how they relate to the total program. They will also want the specific details of what is expected of them.

Volunteers cannot be expected to do what they do not know. The job of the trainer is to provide them with the information they need, not just to respond to questions.

Orientation programs for beginning leaders need to include information on:

- The purpose of 4-H.
- Leadership tasks in 4-H. Explore and describe the various leadership roles.
- 4-H meetings. Explain how leaders and members plan and conduct the day-to-day operation of a 4-H club.
- Planning programs for the individual. Discuss how to consider the social and economic family situations of each 4-H member as the leader develops learning experiences for the individual and the group.
- How 4-H members learn. How can the leader apply basic learning principles to the 4-H program?

The above information is contained in other sections of this notebook. Share copies of this material with the leaders you recruit during a personal contact.

Training Methods

The first principle of training is to gauge your efforts according to the experiences and maturity of the individual or group. Do not attempt to do the same thing with all of them. Let your new leaders progress, grow and develop confidence.

A “cafeteria” approach to training each volunteer leader seems worthy of consideration. This allows the individual leader, with your counseling, to pick and choose his training from a much larger training program.

Leaders won’t learn everything at meetings. Provide a variety of ways to help them learn. There should be simple, clearly written information available to use as needed. Be sure experienced leaders are available as a resource for the more inexperienced. Have every leader aware of the visual aids and printed materials available for use with his/her group.

Training may be in formal group settings, informal small group settings, one-to-one question and answer or by supervision and coaching on the job. The trainer may be an Extension agent, a resource person with special skills or an experienced volunteer leader.

Group Techniques

Training in large or small groups not only permits more people to be trained at one time but encourages leaders to share their experiences and learn from each other. This could be done through small discussion groups, coffee conferences, brown bag lunches or workshop settings. Even in large groups, plan to actively involve each leader in some way.

Individualized Instruction

Some leaders enjoy the opportunity to work individually and at their convenience with printed material. The Volunteer Leaders’ Series fact sheets can be found on the Cooperative Extension Service website, www.uaex.edu.

“How To” Skills

Training for volunteers should stress “how to” skills. “How to” skills are learned in two steps: first by getting instructions or directions and then by having a chance to practice.

- Simulate group situations.
- Use case studies from experiences of other volunteers.
- Observe experienced volunteers at work.
- Create short-term apprenticeships.

Hard-to-Reach Volunteers

Contrary to popular belief, almost everyone has been involved in some kind of volunteer action. For many, the volunteering was done on a very personal basis and was referred to as “helping out” or “lending a hand.” This meant responding to the needs of friends and neighbors and seldom involved working

through a formal program or agency. A volunteer is a volunteer. Differences among volunteers necessitate adapting training methods. However, the goals of an effective volunteer leadership program remain the same. The more flexible you are, the greater your chance to recruit and use volunteers. Break a big job into reasonable pieces and look for a volunteer to do each piece.

Each person is the result of previous experiences that have influenced his/her perceptions, attitudes and values. Be aware and open to the life experiences of the people you contact.

For all but a few, money is a major factor in deciding to volunteer. Whenever possible, use careful planning to minimize the expenses related to volunteering.

Follow-Up

Even when volunteers are familiar with subject matter, teaching techniques and maintaining effective relationships, they will need some ongoing support in order to be successful.

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