Ohio State University Extension Crowdsourcing Insight Summary: 4-H Youth Development

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Preface

Purpose

The purpose of a program review is to guide program development on a continual basis. A program review is a process that evaluates the status, effectiveness, and progress of programs and helps identify future direction and priorities. Program reviews are a standard practice in youth development programs (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016) and higher education (Halonen & Dunn, 2017). The Ohio State University Extension 4-H Youth Development program review is a voluntary practice for self-study and external review.

The Review Includes Five Elements

- The State of Youth Development in Ohio
- Ohio State University Extension 4-H Youth Development Internal Self-Study
- Ohio State University Extension Crowdsourcing Insight Summary: 4-H Youth Development
- External committee visits and final report
- Key stakeholder communication throughout the process

Context

Ohio State University Extension embarked upon a multi-year effort to build the Extension organization of the future. That journey began with the *Vice President's Conversation on the Future of Extension*. The overall goal of that effort was to ensure that OSU Extension remains relevant and responsive to the needs of Ohioans well into the future.

Data gathered through the *Vice President's Conversation* was used as a foundation for a designEXT **effort to put ideas into action.** One of the designEXT steps includes partnering with individuals and communities to co-create multi-faceted solutions for current and emerging issues.

The *OSU Extension 4-H Youth Development Program Review* is the first of a series of OSU Extension program reviews. This project timing coincides with a national search for a new statewide leader.

> "Seaman Knapp, known to many of us as the Father of Extension, reportedly advised new faculty against ever referring to themselves as 'experts.' More than 100 years ago, new Extension agents in Ohio were introduced to their communities as 'not a man who comes to criticize existing methods and force his own ideas, but is rather a clearing house where all may bring their problems and work them out together.' …
>
> "By working in this way, we become a partner in co-creating solutions to issues people care about. The 'work' therefore involves bringing local knowledge and science-based information together in a manner that recognizes and honors both."
>
> *(excerpted from u.osu.edu/conspectus, Roger Rennekamp – December 13, 2016)*

Contact

Ohio State University Extension Program Reviews are conducted on behalf of Dr. Roger Rennekamp, director of OSU Extension and associate dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences. Program Reviews are led by Dr. Julie Fox, with support from Michelle Gaston.

https://extension.osu.edu/strategic-initiatives/ohio-4-h-program-review

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I. Introduction

A. Purpose

The objective of this report was to provide an overview of the analysis of the open-ended crowdsourcing survey that was conducted with Ohio State University Extension employees in February 2019. This report is a result of the analysis of comments from 365 respondents.

B. Methods

Crowdsourcing is an effective and powerful practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of geographically dispersed people (Doan, Ramakrishnan, & Halevy, 2011; Estellés-Arolas & González-Ladrón-De-Guevara, 2012; Merriam-Webster, 2014; Raison, Fox & D'Adamo-Damery, 2014).

A two-question survey invitation was sent via email to 970 OSU Extension personnel included on the "ALL-Extension" listserv and the OSU Extension human resource database. The initial email was sent to this statewide group on February 1, 2019, with a follow-up reminder sent to non-respondents the following week. All Extension personnel were included in this inquiry to gain insight from interdisciplinary perspectives. There were 365 respondents for a response rate of 37.6%.

Two researchers on the OSU Extension Learning and Organizational Development team analyzed the survey data using NVivo software. After reading through the transcriptions, the codebook was created by a researcher on the team and verified by another researcher. Then the two researchers collaboratively reviewed the coding system for validity. Two researchers coded the transcriptions independently, and then the files were combined for the final analysis.

During the analysis process, themes that participants mentioned more often and across most of the participants were identified as "Primary Themes" and themes that were mentioned in some responses were identified as "Secondary Themes." Some themes were identified but rarely mentioned, so were not included in the report. This report will highlight the findings of the two survey questions.

C. Summary of Findings

Two open-ended questions prompted responses with primary and secondary themes.

Question 1. If you could transform Ohio 4-H in any way you wish, what one to three things would you do?

> **Primary Themes:** Administration and management; Programming, Communication and promotion; Resources; Location
> **Secondary Theme:** Accessibility

Question 2. How can Ohio 4-H be responsive to increasing diversity of youth in Ohio?

> **Primary Themes:** Accessibility; Programming; Resources; Location
> **Secondary Themes:** Outreach and building partnerships; Promotion and communication; Training

From the qualitative analysis of the crowdsourcing information, there was overlap in the themes identified in the responses to the two questions.

II. Question 1. If you could transform Ohio 4-H in any way you wish, what one to three things would you do?

A. Primary Themes

1. Administration and management: In this theme, participants shared their opinions and suggestions on change related to policies and leadership of OSU Extension. Participants shared their ideas about the operational decisions of the organization as a whole rather than on a specific county or office. Some codes were lack of consistency, heavy load of paperwork, and administrative task as policies participants addressed.

    a) **Load of paperwork and administrative duties**.

      Examples:

      "Offer state-level support for paperwork and have less paperwork."

      "Make paperwork and mandatory trainings less burdensome for our 4-H volunteers."

    b) **Lack of consistency**.

      Examples:

      "Uniform rules throughout the state for county fair projects when possible."

      "Standardize many county programs statewide. It's confusing to families when there are 88 different versions of programs and requirements throughout Ohio."

2. Programming: In this area, participants were concerned about the type of programs offered to the youth. They suggested adding programs. Some of the codes in this area included the following.

    a) **Non-traditional programs:** Participants shared their thoughts about adding new programs that address specific needs and non-traditional programs. Comments from participants stated they both want the traditional programs to be retained and also want newer programs that will address new career options and opportunities that suit the needs of the youth. Some suggested adding more career-focused programming that can give the youth skills needed to be competitive in the future such as leadership skills.

      Examples:

      "Providing community-related programs for youth to be involved to develop community mindedness and leadership skills."

      "Create projects that help with career prep. No need to create hog farmers. Why don't we reward STEM projects like we do livestock kids with Jr. Fair sales with scholarships."

    b) **Academic focus**: In this code, participants believed that the 4-H programs should be more focused on the educational benefits to the youth. Many comments were in two main areas to have more connections with the schools in programming for after-school programs or as some suggested linking 4-H to school curriculums. Many suggested providing resources and experiences to assist in enabling youth to enter college

Examples:

"Incorporate info into Kindergarten-3rd grade students' curriculum."

"Love to make it a part of the school's curriculum program, kinda like an introductory/exploratory class in elementary and middle schools."

"Partner with state of Ohio school district to bring 4-H into the classroom more."

"Encourage college visits to youth (give the youth college experiences)."

"Connect 4-H youth with 4-H resources when they enter college."

3. Communication and Promotion: Participants shared ideas on the use of different marketing channels to reach the target audience. The content of the communication messages was also addressed as participants believed that 4-H should reach out to non-traditional audiences and provide clarity about the programs offered.

Examples:

"Better marketing to youth and families, so they understand that it is more than farm animal projects."

"Put forth more marketing efforts which makes people understand that 4-H does not just mean 'livestock' – common misconception."

"Focus on marketing to 1st generation 4-H'ers."

4. Resources: Participants emphasized the need to increase 4-H resources; this theme has the following codes.

a) **Staff:** The need for more staff and support staff to facilitate 4-H work has been mentioned by many participants. Also, some mentioned having more state specialists to assist educators in the counties. A few mentioned the need for proper onboarding and mentoring programs for educators. A reflection of the ideas regarding staffing is captured in the quotes below.

Examples:

"More field specialists that have specific duties for programming in counties. Example: A Quality Assurance specialist who has expert level knowledge to travel to each area and do trainings with youth."

"Create a 4-H mentoring program – so that each new member [*of the Extension 4-H educator team*] has a buddy to ask questions, remind them of upcoming deadlines, etc"

"Staffing – Clear division of responsibility in two educator counties; better onboarding and support for new professionals; hired backfill for 4-H educators who are area leaders; better understanding of promotion process."

b) **Financial Resources:** Many participants highlighted the need for more support to counties with limited funding and a need to create a more equitable and stable model to support county 4-H educator positions. Some participants offered specific suggestions for methods of generating the revenue necessary to stabilize staffing.

Examples:

"Restore funding to enable 4-H to retain the excellent staff and programs they already have in place."

"Statewide or nationwide fundraiser focused on entrepreneurship much like the Girl Scout cookie program."

c) **Volunteers:** The comments around volunteers varied widely' but could be organized around several areas such as; management and training of volunteers.

Examples:

"More uniformity in volunteer trainings and management."

"Create more opportunity for volunteers to receive training that is personally fulfilling in addition to benefiting their club members."

"Make it easier to become a volunteer."

5. Location: Most of the participants advised expanding 4-H programs in urban and suburban areas. In addition, they emphasized that programs should address the needs of urban and suburban youth. Many participants stressed the importance of programming for urban/suburban communities while sustaining connections in rural areas.

Examples:

"Expanding agriculture and the rural experience to those in an urban setting so that they are not the standard 4 generations removed from agriculture and can be the informed consumer or spokesperson."

"Hire more professionals to work in the cities to promote 1st generation 4-H'ers and grow the program."

"Make it more current ... stereotype of just for farm kids is still present."

B. Secondary Themes

1. Accessibility: This theme captures all the codes that talked about making 4-H programs accessible to youth with different backgrounds. The codes in this theme include the following.

a) **Flexibility:** Participants suggested making it easier to establish new clubs and to participate in 4-H.

Example:

"Make it easier for non-traditional clubs to form (spin clubs, after school, etc.)"

b) **Cost:** Participants talked about the high cost of joining, but not only that they talked about poverty as the constraint to having animals or money for the projects.

Examples:

"Create community barns for poor, disadvantaged youth to experience animal projects"

"Even miscellaneous projects require money and a parent with time to devote to helping the youth. How can we create experiences with group or low-cost projects requiring less adult supervision?"

c) **Diversity:** Engaging diverse populations to have accessible programs. Participants highlighted the importance of having diverse staff to represent the diversity of the counties where the programs are offered. In addition, they highlighted the importance of having a welcoming environment for kids from various backgrounds.

Examples:

"Make a strategic plan to recruit a more diverse population."

"More educators of color.

III. Question 2. How can Ohio 4-H be responsive to increasing diversity of youth in Ohio?

A. Primary Themes

1. Accessibility: This theme covers codes that suggest facilitation of diverse youths' access to the 4-H program.

    a) **Staff to engage diverse population:** For the programs to be responsive to the diverse youths' needs it's suggested to recruit staff that reflects the diversity of the counties.

    Examples:

    "By hiring staff that mirrors the diversity and placing them in areas with diversity where needs are currently being unmet."

    "In the areas where we have various ethnic youth audiences we need educators or program assistants that can relate and communicate what 4-H has to offer."

    b) **Culture:** Offer more culturally diverse programs and have educators who are more aware and culturally sensitive.

    Examples:

    "More cultures could be represented in our staff and volunteers like those who speak multiple languages including signing."

    "Cultural education for educators in terms of effective ways to engage non-traditional audiences, people from other cultures."

    c) **Language:** Participants suggested offering materials and programs in different languages. Some also highlighted the importance of using a more inclusive language.

    Examples:

    "Speak their language – not only by offering programming in Spanish, Somali, etc, but by offering program that appeals to diverse youth – it isn't necessarily ag-based."

    "I think we could all use a refresher on inclusive vocabulary and considering context in our 'story.'"

    d) **Engaging diverse population:** Providing programs for a diverse community and being inclusive. Some participants highlighted what they meant by diversity (ethnicity, socio-economic, first generation) yet some participants did not explain what they mean by engaging a diverse population.

    Examples:

    "Believe we need to non-discriminate, but that is different than celebrating differences. Provide meaningful learning opportunities without regard to gender, race, etc. is what we should strive for not creating opportunities for small minorities to be celebrated for their differences."

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e) **Very few mentioned the recent efforts to include LGBTQ such as the summit.**

Example:

"The LGBTQ Summit was a wonderful start. It's relatively easy to do this in our urban areas, less so in our rural areas. Must make concerted efforts to seek out diversity in rural Ohio and be ready to offer something those populations will see the value of."

2. Programming: In this area, participants were concerned about the type of programs offered to the youth and suggested programs that are more appealing to the diverse youth.

a) **Non-traditional programs:** Some suggestions were concrete such as more STEM programs and agricultural education. However, most of the ideas in this theme were vague such as providing diverse programs and non-traditional programs.

Examples:

"We need to look at what it means to be a club and what it means to be a member and how we can identify opportunities to enroll youth who are not traditionally served while also identifying ways to better serve our current members" and another comment "A more non-traditional approach to education ... few clubs/more camps"

"Always be providing kids with leadership and growth opportunities and goals to work towards. Teach common sense and critical thinking skills whenever possible."

b) **Schools:** Schools are being identified as the channel through which educators can reach out to kids from all backgrounds and better serve them.

Examples:

"Again, more interaction in schools and creating opportunities for low income children that do not have an adult to mentor them. Community involvement is crucial."

"We have to offer more programming at the school. Some kids have no other way to go to a local community 4-H Meeting. If we get the kids at a younger age, they will stay longer. Athletics take some of the kids away from 4-H"

3. Resources: Participants emphasized the need to increase 4-H resources. Hiring more staff with diverse backgrounds and the abilities to design comprehensive programs. Some other codes were identified such as have more financial resources and recruit diverse volunteers.

Examples:

"Ohio 4-H will have to hire more staff working in and with specific communities (reflect the intended audience). There is a desire to want more diversity but need to demonstrate a commitment and invest in relationship building to truly move the needle over time."

"Need more diversity in volunteers, club advisors need to reflect the diversity of their communities."

"In urban counties funding is often a challenge, especially because of lack of knowledge of who we are – that, despite our best efforts. I could go on and on, but cutting to the point, if Extension could find funds (grants or otherwise) for a PA in the top urban counties – that would be impactful!"

4. Location: Most of the participants recommended increasing 4-H programs in urban and suburban areas. In addition, comments also indicated that programs need to address the needs of urban and suburban youth.

Examples:

"I would be willing to bet that most young people in the cities know virtually nothing about 4-H (I didn't) and believe it's only for rural and farm youth."

"With that being said, I believe the challenge is how to engage our youth that come from an urban setting with those that come from a rural setting. We tend to have programs that serve one or the other but have not yet found a way to effectively serve both parties together."

B. Secondary Themes

1. Outreach and building partnerships: Many participants recommended leveraging 4-H programs and extend services to underprivileged members of the community. Most participants in this theme suggested building and strengthening partnerships with other constituents.

Examples:

"Ohio 4-H is a great program that builds life-skills in youth yet it is perceived as a rural youth program. By partnering with other organization in areas of the community and with programs more attuned to urban life, the possibility of appealing to a more diverse group of youth could exists.

"Possible partnership with Columbus' World Affairs Council to explore how their Global Fluency Programming could enhancing our youth programming."

2. Promotion and Communication: The participants believed there is a need for marketing campaigns and the use of different communication channels to reach out to the target population. Moreover, some participants highlighted the importance of marketing materials that resemble the diversity in the communities being served.

Examples:

"Offer informational assemblies at community centers; provide informational tables at local festivals; and provide info as part of an orientation prior to the start of summer sports camps."

"Diversify marketing photos to be reflective of diverse demographics across the state, including pictures representing different ableness."

3. Training: Some participants believed that educators and 4-H staff need training in diversity and that current trends in Ohio need to be reflected in all training materials.

> *Examples:*
>
> "More training for advisors and county volunteers. Many educators know how to reach diverse populations, but many advisors are focused on the "Traditional" 4-Hers in clubs that show livestock at the county fair."
>
> "Learn by doing" – put 4-H professionals in settings and within audiences that challenge traditional ways of thinking, teaching, and learning."

IV. Conclusion

From the qualitative analysis of the crowdsourcing information the following conclusions can be drawn.

Responses to both of the questions our participants addressed reflected the strong need for greater responsiveness to the increasing diversity of Ohio youth. Specific suggestions included implementing new policies and guidelines that will increase accessibility in its many forms and through multiple mechanisms.

Participants' perceptions about diversity primarily mentioned included ethnicity, culture, and language while issues around other definitions of diversity were rarely mentioned. According to USDA, diversity is defined as "the full spectrum of human uniqueness that shapes our workplace, which includes, but is not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures." (USDA, 2014, p.2) This finding suggests that the 4-H program could do more to promote diversity in its programs across the full spectrum of uniqueness in our communities and state.

In addition, both questions yielded a number of important ideas for strengthening the Ohio 4-H program in the coming years. On the surface, these common sense ideas may appear to be so general, it may be easy to overlook the critical differences addressing them can make for the Ohio 4-H program. Moreover, to make a meaningful difference, a myriad of actions and advancements will be needed. These ideas included increasing accessibility, streamlining management and administration, updating programming to meet the changing needs of an evolving youth culture, creating greater awareness of 4-H programming and its possibilities through more effective promotion and communication, and instituting new and creative methods of increasing resources – the final idea being perhaps the most profound, the most difficult, and the most needed.

Additional analysis can be done in the future to compare responses from those who identified as living in urban, suburban, and rural locations.

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