

# Ohio 4-H Agents' and Volunteer Leaders' Perceptions of the Volunteer Leadership Development Program

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The subject of volunteerism has been covered in numerous studies (Boyce, 1971; Naylor, 1976). The popularity of the subject is further reflected in the fact that today volunteers continue to plan an increasing role in our society. The 4-H program is one of the major program areas of the Cooperative Extension Service, and, as an out-of-school youth educational program, relies heavily on volunteer leaders for the success of the program. These volunteers contribute their time, talent, and effort to further the goals of the extension organization. Several studies have addressed the role of 4-H volunteers in enabling the achievement of 4-H goals. Some of these studies have emphasized the reasons for volunteering and the effectiveness with which an agency may utilize its volunteer personnel (Boyce, 1976; Naylor, 1973).

The considerable amount of literature on 4-H volunteers clearly indicates that the central and important role of these volunteers in the organization cannot be overemphasized. Two pertinent issues that need to be addressed regarding the role of volunteers include an understanding of why people volunteer and the establishment of a systematic program for the development of volunteers. An aspect of the latter issue is the focus of this study. Basic continuing changes in society as well as changing leader roles make it imperative to have a viable program for the development of 4-H volunteers. Dolan (1969) presented a leadership development process that had seven subprocesses or phases: leader identification, leader selection, leader orientation, leader training, leader utilization, leader recognition, and leader evaluation. Following a review of literature for this study, the authors identified and grouped the 4-H volunteer leadership development program components under six subareas, viz: (a) recruiting, (b) training, (c) motivation, (d) recognition, (e) retention, and (f) supervision.

## Purpose and Objective

The main purpose of this study was to determine the level of importance of these six areas of volunteer leadership development as perceived by volunteers and by 4-H agents. The perceptions of the volunteers were seen as paramount since they were the target for the leadership development program and since their direct participation in identifying the level of importance of the development area would reflect the level of emphasis they perceived as necessary for each area. The perceptions of the agents were deemed necessary since they were responsible for planning, conducting, coordinating and evaluating county educational programs for 4-H and youth.

Specifically, the objectives of this study included:

1. To describe the level of importance of recruiting, training, motivation, recognition, retention, and supervision in the volunteer leadership development program as perceived by 4-H agents in Ohio.

2. To describe the level of importance of recruiting, training, motivation, recognition, retention, and supervision in the volunteer leadership development program as perceived by 4-H volunteers.

3. To determine if differences exist between 4-H agents and volunteer leaders on their perceptions of the level of importance of recruiting, training, motivation, recognition, retention, and supervision in the volunteer leadership development program.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study was descriptive in nature and utilized mail questionnaires in a survey for data collection.

### Populations and Sample

The populations for this study were extension 4-H agents and volunteer leaders in the state of Ohio. A combination of multi-stage and systematic sampling techniques were employed to draw a representative sample of 10 4-H agents and 320 4-H volunteer leaders for the study.

### Instrumentation and Data Collection

A questionnaire was designed to collect data on the perceptions of respondents concerning six subareas identified under the volunteer leadership development program. These six areas were: Recruiting, training, motivation, recognition, retention, and supervision. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of statements pertaining to the six areas. The level of importance was measured on a 6-point scale designed as follows: 0 = no importance, 1 = little importance, 2 = some importance, 3 = important, 4 = high importance, 5 = essential.

A panel of experts was used to ascertain the content validity of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were established for the instrument subscales from pilot test results. The reliability coefficients were .56 for recruiting, .93 for training, .83 for motivation, .89 for recognition, .86 for retention, and .77 for supervision. A total of 10 (100%) and 201 (63%) responses for 4-H agents and volunteer leaders, respectively, was received after the initial and follow-up mailings. A comparison of early and late respondents revealed no significant differences in the means, so all the questionnaires from the first and second mailing were combined, agents with agents, and volunteer leaders with volunteer leaders, and analyzed.

### Data Analysis

Measures of central tendency, percentage distributions and frequencies were computed to describe characteristics of both 4-H agents and volunteer leaders. Pertaining to the level of importance of volunteer leadership development areas, the following scale was used: 5 = essential, 4 = high importance, 3 = important, 2 = some importance, 1 = little importance, and 0 = no importance. The mean, median, standard deviation, range, and frequencies were computed to describe 4-H agents and volunteer leaders on their rated perception of the level of importance of the volunteer leadership development program areas. Also, *t*-tests of significance were used to determine if significant differences existed between the two groups on their perceptions of the level of importance of the six volunteer leadership development program areas. An alpha level of .05 was set a priori.

## Results

### Recruiting

Recruiting was defined as the sequence of steps or actions involved in the enrollment of volunteers as 4-H club leaders. 4-H agents and volunteer leaders considered it most important for volunteers to recruit other volunteers. The mean value for recruiting was 3.12 and 2.65 for agents and volunteers, respectively (Table 1). No significant difference was found between the means for the two groups. Other recruiting items receiving high scores were "be given a job description when recruited" and "be recruited for specific tasks" (Table 2).

Table 1

### Comparison of 4-H Agents and Volunteer Leaders on Perceptions of Volunteer Leadership Development Area

Area	4-H Agents		4-H Volunteer Leaders		t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Recruiting	3.12	0.68	2.65	0.77	1.89
Training	3.81	0.42	3.86	0.67	.18
Motivation	3.51	0.56	2.82	0.72	2.92*
Recognition	3.13	0.56	2.32	0.94	3.30*
Retention	3.63	0.48	2.98	0.73	2.80*
Supervision	3.31	0.56	3.04	0.74	1.15

\*p<.05.

### Training

Training was defined as an orderly succession of related events designed to prepare the volunteer to be a 4-H club leader. As indicated in Table 1, 4-H leaders and 4-H volunteers considered training most important by ranking the area above all other areas with mean scores of 3.81 and 3.86, respectively. The difference in the two means was not significant. The training item ranked highest by 4-H agents in terms of level of importance was "volunteers should understand the objectives of the 4-H program," whereas volunteers ranked the item "volunteers should understand youth and their needs" highest. Other training items receiving high scores were "understand the role of the 4-H volunteer leadership" and "understand how to plan programs" (Table 2).

### Motivation

Motivation was defined as the intrinsic and extrinsic force that induced the individual to volunteer and continues to sustain the individual's interest in the 4-H organization as a 4-H club leader. Motivation was ranked third most important of the six areas by 4-H agents while 4-H volunteer leaders ranked it fourth in level of importance (Table 1). The mean rating for the area was 3.51 and 2.82 for 4-H

Table 2

Ranking of Items on Volunteer Development Subscales

Volunteer Development Statement	Mean Ranking of Items	
	4-H Agents	Volunteer Leaders
Recruiting		
Volunteers should:		
1. Be recruited by county agents.	2.60	2.40
2. Be recruited by other volunteers.	3.70	3.10
3. Be recruited for specific tasks.	3.30	3.00
4. Be recruited for specific time periods.	2.90	1.80
5. Be interviewed for possible volunteer positions and selected based on their competency.	2.80	2.30
6. Be given a job description when recruited.	3.40	2.90
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Training		
Volunteers should:		
1. Understand the philosophy of the 4-H program.	2.60	2.40
2. Understand the objectives of the 4-H program.	4.50	4.40
3. Understand the role of 4-H volunteer leadership.	4.30	4.30
4. Understand how to plan programs.	3.90	3.70
5. Understand how to conduct programs.	3.30	3.80
6. Understand youth and their needs.	3.90	4.40
7. Understand how to conduct meetings using parliamentary procedure.	3.30	3.20
8. Understand how to utilize educational materials.	3.70	3.50
9. Understand how to utilize resource people.	3.50	3.60
10. Understand how to evaluate 4-H programs.	3.00	3.40
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Motivation		
Volunteers should:		
1. Participate in significant decision making in matters relating to 4-H.	3.30	3.60
2. Participate in training activities inside and outside the 4-H organization (e.g., conferences).	3.50	3.20
3. Receive some monetary reward.	1.80	2.50
4. Receive recognition from the 4-H organization.	4.20	2.80
5. Receive recognition from the community for services rendered to the 4-H club.	3.70	1.00
6. Receive supportive feedback from clients, co-workers and professional leadership.	3.90	3.20
7. Be placed in areas relating to their interests.	4.20	3.70

(table continues)

Volunteer Development Statement	Mean Ranking of Items	
	4-H Agents	Volunteer Leaders
<b>Recognition</b>		
Volunteers should:		
1. Receive recognition for participating in the 4-H program.	4.10	2.90
2. Receive awards based on service.	3.20	2.60
3. Be recognized publicly through dinners and mass media.	3.60	2.40
4. Receive tangible recognition (pins, certificates of appreciation).	3.50	2.50
5. Be given a cash award.	1.20	0.60
6. Be given informal verbal recognition, praise and encouragement by others involved in the 4-H organization.	4.30	3.00
7. Be financially sponsored on trips, training conferences, etc.	3.30	2.30
<b>Retention</b>		
Volunteers should:		
1. Be rewarded for their time served in 4-H.	4.10	2.50
2. Be more involved in planning county 4-H program.	3.60	3.20
3. Be reimbursed for some of the expenses incurred as a result of 4-H activities.	2.80	1.80
4. Be given professional support by 4-H agents.	4.10	3.70
5. Be given support with 4-H programs by key leaders and 4-H program assistants.	3.90	3.40
6. Be involved in developing training plans for volunteer leaders	3.70	3.00
7. Be encouraged to attend sessions by making sessions interesting (e.g., inclusion of movies, coffee breaks, etc.).	3.20	3.10
<b>Supervision</b>		
Volunteers should:		
1. Be provided with current information on 4-H through the supply of current bulletins.	4.10	4.00
2. Meet with other volunteers and 4-H agents to discuss their problems.	3.80	3.50
3. Be given recognition for their involvement in 4-H work.	4.10	2.70
4. Be criticized constructively in private only when it is necessary.	3.50	3.20
5. Be provided with a good work environment; e.g., cooperation by 4-H program assistants, etc.	4.00	3.60
6. Be visited at least once a year by the county agent.	2.80	2.80
7. Be evaluated by 4-H Club members.	2.20	2.50
8. Be evaluated by 4-H agents.	2.80	2.60
9. Be evaluated by 4-H program assistants.	2.50	2.40

agents and volunteer leaders, respectively. A t-test indicated a significant difference between the two means (Table 1). The motivation item rated highest by volunteers on the subscale was "volunteers should be placed in areas relating to their interests." The item considered least important by both 4-H agents and volunteer leaders was "volunteers should receive some monetary reward." 4-H agents indicated that volunteers should "receive recognition from the 4-H organization" (Table 2).

### Recognition

This was defined as a formal and/or informal, favorable attention given to the volunteer 4-H club leader to provide him/her a sense of appreciation, security, and belonging. Recognition was ranked fifth and sixth in terms of the level of importance by 4-H agents and volunteer leaders, respectively. The subarea of recognition received a mean rating of 3.13 from 4-H agents and 2.32 from volunteer leaders. The t-test indicated a significant difference between the two means. 4-H volunteers were consistent with the agents in considering "informal verbal recognition, praise, and encouragement by others involved in the 4-H organization" the most important item (Table 2).

### Retention

Retention was defined as the actions involved in reducing volunteer turnover. The two retention items ranked highest by 4-H agents in terms of level of importance were "volunteer leaders should be given professional support by 4-H agents" and "volunteer leaders should be rewarded for their time served in 4-H." Volunteer leaders considered the item "volunteer leaders should be given professional support by 4-H agents" as the most important item of the items measuring the retention domain (Table 2). 4-H agents considered retention of higher importance than did volunteer leaders. A significant difference was found in the mean rating of 3.63 and 2.98 for 4-H agents and volunteer leaders, respectively (Table 1). Respondents indicated that volunteer leaders should be more involved in planning county 4-H programs and in developing training plans for volunteer leaders (Table 2).

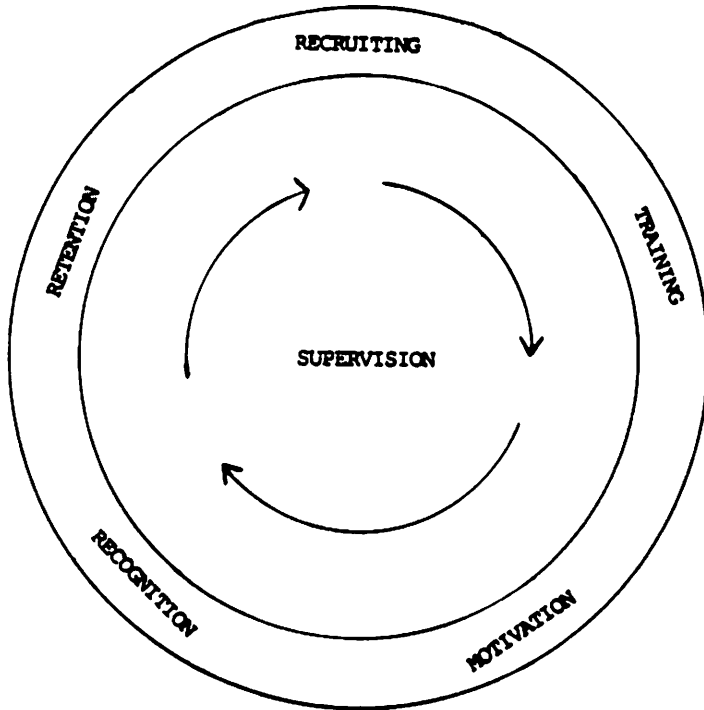
### Supervision

Supervision was defined as the enabling actions used by agents to facilitate the work of volunteer leaders. Concerning supervision, the items considered most important by 4-H agents were "volunteers should be provided with current information on 4-H through the supply of current bulletins" and "volunteers should be given recognition for their involvement in 4-H work." 4-H volunteer leaders considered the item "volunteers should be provided with current information on 4-H through the supply of current bulletins" the most important of the supervision items. "Constructive criticism" and "meeting with other volunteers and 4-H agents to discuss their problems" were among items ranked important on the supervision subscale (Table 2).

## Discussion and Implications

The need for a systematic volunteer development program incorporating aspects of the findings of this study cannot be over-emphasized when viewed in the light of an overall successful 4-H program. The mean values of the six subareas as ranked by both agents indicated that they perceived all six areas as important in the development of 4-H volunteer leaders. A model of volunteer leadership development (Figure 1), beginning with recruiting and encompassing training, motivation, recognition, retention, and supervision, would, therefore, seem very

appropriate. Although deemed important, recruiting and recognition were rated as the lowest two areas of the six in importance by both 4-H agents and volunteer leaders, suggesting that whereas the volunteer development program may begin with a recruitment drive, participants in the study considered the subsequent actions of training, motivation, supervision, and retention more important. Training was considered most important of the six subareas studied.



**Figure 1.** Model for volunteer development.

While the recruiting effort may be continuous and targeted at the entire community, some reliance may be placed on existing volunteer leaders to recruit other volunteers. This has the advantage of taking some work load off the 4-H agent and an added advantage of an informal selection process, since volunteers' relationships with new recruits would already have kindled interest in the 4-H organization. The results suggest that a job description during this effort may be helpful. It is recommended that in this regard, a "volunteer expertise pool" be established in each county with county 4-H agents compiling lists of resource volunteers whose expertise can be drawn on by all clubs. The list may have the volunteer's name, expertise (or field of interest), most probable times available, address, and telephone number. Volunteers on this list may or may not be regular club advisors.

Sabrosky and Hill (1965) noted that the decision to recruit certain people for volunteer 4-H work was influenced by their apparent skills and attitudes and by the amount of training one thought they would need.

Pertaining to training, the findings suggested that volunteers should be made to understand their roles with respect to the philosophy and objectives of the 4-H program. Thus any volunteer leadership development program should incorporate the systematic provision of pertinent information on 4-H. Planning and conducting of programs involving aspects such as the use of educational programs and the utilization of resource people should constitute key aspects of the training program.

The importance of training has been recognized in previous studies by Boyce (1971) and the National 4-H Volunteer Leadership Development Committee (1973). Boyce suggested that the training program should assist the leader in developing the basic skills necessary to perform the assigned task, give the leader a feeling of confidence, and provide the leader with support and an opportunity for personal growth. The report of the National 4-H Volunteer Leadership Development Committee suggested building training around the individual's own situation. The committee urged the consideration of individualized instruction through programmed texts, self-learning centers, volunteers counseling volunteers, radio, television and other technologies.

With regard to motivation, volunteers emphasized placement in areas relating to their interest. This finding is important in the sense that 4-H may be at a stage where several specialized people may be needed as resource people by several clubs instead of an advisor for each club. Volunteers may be further motivated by allowing them increasing participation in decision-making matters relating to 4-H. This should be reinforced with supportive feedback from clients, co-workers, and professional leadership. Freeman (1978) examined the organizational factors contributing to the motivation of the 4-H volunteer leaders and found that factors contributing to job satisfaction (motivation factors) were recognition, work itself, responsibility, personal growth, achievement, and relations with members and parents.

Adequate and appropriate recognition will serve to further strengthen volunteers' motivation. The findings suggested informal verbal recognition, praise, and encouragement as well as the provision of tangible recognition (pins, certificates of merit, and certificates of appreciation). The above together with the provision of professional support by 4-H agents were suggested as actions that would encourage the retention of volunteer leaders.

While the logical sequence of events seems to be recruiting, training, motivation, recognition, retention, and supervision, it is apparent that some level of supervision must be exercised by the 4-H agent at each stage of the continuing process (Figure 1). The results of the study indicated that supervision may be in the form of provision of current information on 4-H through the supply of current bulletins and scheduled meetings with other volunteers and 4-H agents to discuss their problems. Scheduled visits by agents and some recognition and constructive criticism were deemed appropriate.

The model for volunteer development (Figure 1) arising out of the study presents a guide for recruiting, developing, and retaining volunteer leaders. The concept of recruitment has been and will continue to be very important to the 4-H program since the program relies very heavily on the use of volunteer leaders. An organization that depends heavily on volunteers must have an effective recruiting program to meet the

expanding roles of the organization or to alleviate turnover. The importance of training cannot be overemphasized. Once recruited, considerable effort must be made to train the volunteer leaders. It is important to involve the new volunteers in planning the training program as much as possible, as this will ensure that specific areas of need are accorded the necessary attention.

It is important to understand and support the motivation of the individual volunteer. The decision to volunteer is reversible, and agents must take steps to encourage retention and intensify volunteer commitment. By paying attention to their own values, attitudes, and behaviors as professional supervisors, and by focusing on the goals of the 4-H organization, agents will be exercising positive influence which may in turn motivate volunteer leaders. A good recognition component built into the overall development effort will go a long way toward ensuring that the aims of the organization are achieved.

Finally, good supervision must be provided by agents to encourage continuing volunteer interest and commitment. Without a salary reward system, every effort must be made to ensure that the new volunteer will have a long, happy and successful period of service.

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