

ALASKA 4-H PROGRAM REVIEW
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS

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Submitted by:

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INTRODUCTION

An external review team, as invited by CES and University of Alaska Fairbanks administration, conducted an in-depth external review of the Alaska 4-H Youth Development program during August 2006. The team was comprised of representatives from Alaska and two other states.

A program review serves multiple purposes, but perhaps the greatest outcome is the process of introspection – as stakeholders in the program collect and organize information and share the story with others. Often, the highest form of evaluation is self-evaluation as stakeholders in the program reflect on inputs and outputs.

However, the added value of an external review is the experience base the reviewers bring to the process from their diverse professions, experiences in organizational and youth development, and geographic locations. On the surface, the 4-H program may appear to be a simple process of providing young people with important subject matter knowledge and critical life skills. However, the program is quite complex in keeping with the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” The 4-H “village” is complex, involving multiple organizational systems that must interact in a healthy manner to provide efficiency of operations and effectiveness of positive youth development outcomes. The review team commends the administration for structuring a review team and process that allowed the 4-H program to be reviewed within its organizational context as a part of the Cooperative Extension and Land Grant University System, as a part of federal and state government, and as a provider of local services to citizens through volunteers.

The overall objectives of the review were to:

- Assess the overall impact of the Alaska 4-H Youth Development Program and envision strategic opportunities for the future.
- Describe the current size and scope of the Alaska 4-H Youth Development Program.
- Describe the productivity of the relationship between program mission accomplishment and CRCED/CES/4-H structure and functions.
- Determine connections between contemporary Alaska youth needs and Alaska 4-H Best Practices.
- Document the assets of Alaska 4-H Youth Development from local, state, and national perspectives.

Several of these objectives were accomplished by the preparation of an extensive syllabus of program materials that were provided to the team prior to their arrival. The team would like to thank all who participated in the collection and preparation of these references.

The final report is based upon multiple inputs including:

- Review of organizational program documents and statistical reports, position descriptions, organizational charts, state demographic and service need documents, marketing materials, budgets, and curriculum
- Presentations by and interaction with administrators, faculty, agents and support staff
- Presentations and focus groups in several locations throughout the state involving youth, parents, volunteers, agents, staff, collaborators, and sponsors
- Analysis of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) profiles completed by personnel and clientele
- Interactive meeting and conference calls to synthesize observations and recommendations

The report is organized into an executive summary of overarching observations and recommendations followed by sections that represent critical components of important organizational development processes:

- Organizational Climate, Structure, and Functions
- 4-H Program Management
- Professional Staff and Staff Development
- Program Planning and Development
- Curriculum
- Volunteer Development
- Communications, Public Relations, and Marketing
- Resource Development
- Delivery Systems and Balance
- Technology
- Diversity

Efforts have been made to develop a succinct report. However, some duplicative recommendations are indicative of the interactive nature of organizational systems and the level of emphasis the team places upon the similar recommendations.

The report also recognizes the need for 4-H/CES/CRCO/University administration to make decisions about prioritization of recommendations based upon resource availability.

The team wishes to express it's appreciation for the efforts to provide an accurate portrayal of the current CES/4-H Youth Development Program, for the hospitality exhibited throughout the team visits, and for the spirit of commitment and entrepreneurship we found in communities for the ultimate goal of positive youth development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PRIMARY ASSETS IDENTIFIED: The team identified many significant assets in the program. The following represent an overview of the most significant assets that were most apparent to the team.

Place-based Innovative Programs – The expansive geography and unique character of various regions of the state necessitate some unique programs in addition to core 4-H program approaches. Many locally responsive programs were identified.

Commitment to Positive Youth Development by agents and volunteers – The overall attitude was one of appreciation for the goal of positive youth development, resisting the pressures of allowing “the project” or “profit” take precedence.

Collaborations and Partnerships at local level – The team found lots of examples of agencies, groups, and individuals finding a way to get things done despite personal loss, financial hurdles, and environmental conditions.

Program Excellence – There were several notable examples of program excellence, some large-scale programs and others very targeted, some base programs and some grant funded. A few examples follow: Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development Fisheries Program; Bug Out; Tracks, Bethel 4-H Youth Center, market livestock in several areas.

Openness to Process (Risk Management, SOP, Volunteer Guide)

Satisfaction-Pride in Results – As in many organizations, the closer one gets to the end product, the more one feels professional satisfaction. The satisfaction and confidence that a positive difference is being made in the lives of youth was profound in local communities as demonstrated by the enthusiasm of agents, volunteers and supporters.

PRIMARY AREAS NEEDING ATTENTION: The following are general findings of an overarching nature that warrant intervention.

- Need for a shared vision and entrepreneurial spirit for CES and 4-H aligned with the University of Alaska Fairbanks land-grant mission
- Need for 4-H, CES, College of Rural and Community Development, and UAF leadership to align vision, strategies, resources and staffing to accomplish specific priority goals that evoke confidence and focused action
- Need for CES/4-H performance metrics and fiscal accountability with evidence of linkage to priority goals, staffing decisions, and program strategies
- Need for a 4-H program management audit to develop a blueprint for consistent management systems that improve statewide efficiency, productivity, and support of staff and volunteers (include a timetable for producing specific program management tools, allocating resources needed, and implementing training as necessary)
- Need to clearly brand an accurate 4-H image in relation to CES and UAF missions. Create and implement a comprehensive integrated marketing/communications program to achieve effective public relations and fundraising for a 4-H program that has intrinsic value to youth and added value to CRCD, CES, and UAF

- Need to collect and analyze data more effectively to package program outcomes for stakeholders in a manner that creates a platform or case statement for growth in program support

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE, STRUCTURE, AND FUNCTIONS

Overview

Climate: 4-H is a component of the larger CES/CRCO/UAF system and is affected by the financial and cultural climates of these superordinate entities. Peter Stortz's passionate statewide leadership is demonstrated by his staunch advocacy for and understanding of the Alaska 4-H programs. His energy level permeates through the Alaska 4-H organization. Peter's activities appear to be directed toward support of projects, programs, and accountability needs at the state and national levels with frequent communication to CES and district leaders. An overall strategy for 4-H was developed in 2002 and then revised in 2003, but still does not address the investment necessary to accomplish the goals of the strategic plan. Lack of reliable resources, either human or financial, leads to a grant-driven focus rather than long-term stability. A large expenditure of time and resources goes to acquiring funds, and a high level of uncertainty about program delivery and continuity exists. Peter leads by example for better (exemplifies knowledge, dedication, passion, and unselfishness towards the mission of service to youth) and worse (lack of availability to develop and carry out long-term goals for the system and potential for becoming burned-out). This situation leads to a high level of anxiety within the system as to whether positions or programs will continue to be funded. 4-H district leaders are supportive of Peter's leadership and recognize the workload Peter has taken. The statewide leadership position is not located in the central office of CES on the UAF campus inhibiting a closer relationship of CES faculty and staff to the 4-H program. The collaborative connection was not demonstrated between the faculty and some staff of CES with the 4-H program. Some CES faculty did not appear to fully embrace the mission or goals of 4-H, and wide-spread faculty support was not evident to the Review Team.

Structure: The 4-H programs are administered through a single leadership position working collaboratively with program leaders from seven districts, one city, and the Eielson/Elmendorf Air Force base on programmatic issues such as curriculum sharing, policy, and training. The statewide 4-H Program Chair is funded at .25 FTE and .75 FTE as Natural Resource and Youth Development Specialist. Additional statewide office staffing includes: 1.0 FTE for two Program Staff positions (both grant funded); .5 FTE as program assistants to Youth Development and Natural Resource and Youth Development respectively. District leadership positions are funded at 6.33 FTE, representing ten positions with 4.5 being state funded and 1.83 being grant funded. Additionally, there is a 1.0 FTE position in Bethel that is a shared City 4-H and Youth Development Educator with 0.5 FTE equal funding from CES and the City of Bethel. Overall state funds account for 69.7% of the position funding, 25% is grant funded, and 5.3% comes from local/city sources. There appears to be alignment with requirements for federal reporting accountability. The 4-H leadership maintains relationships with regional and national associations to share best practices. The organizational chart demonstrates relationships at national and state levels.

Functions: State-wide leadership is responsible for: reports and accountability to national 4-H and CES; liaison for district agents to CES and national 4-H; grant seeking and writing; district program oversight; and statewide policy development, management, implementation, and enforcement. In addition, the leader has his own Natural Resources/Youth Development program to manage. District leaders have been assigned or have volunteered to act on behalf of Alaska 4-H as leads, representatives, and/or points-of-contact for youth programs, 4-H organization conferences, and internal improvement projects.

Observations

Clarity of organizational mission, vision, and goals:

- **Mission:** Statewide leadership and district agents were aligned as they articulated the foundational mission of 4-H for their clubs through their activities and articulated the mission in their presentations.
- **Vision:** Youth outcomes were articulated and demonstrated; however, there was a lack of confidence in program stability with a consensus being that additional core staff would provide long-term growth without burning-out district leaders. Organizational chart demonstrates inefficient model for direct/indirect relationships or linkages with other UAF systems and resources. For example, the advisory leadership committee seems to be reflected incorrectly.
- **Goals:** Goals were programmatic without a clear focus on an investment strategy for sustainability for the 4-H system. There appears to be communication gap between program leaders and decision makers in CES, CRCSD, UAF, and UA. Perhaps due to programmatic or institutional differences, CES faculty does not appear to be aligned with 4-H efforts.

Alignment of management systems to achieve mission, vision, and goals:

- **Mission:** The mission appears to be well served by enthusiastic leaders and volunteers focused on developmental aspects in youth preparedness for mature skills needs. This is demonstrated by the variety of programs addressing district and community needs.
- **Vision:** The vision for management systems is being developed in the areas of volunteer training and screening; however, it is less developed relative to providing for long-term program leadership.
- **Goals:** Goals are mostly programmatic in nature with some policy and leadership training incorporated into the monthly meeting strategy.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities:

- **Roles:** Overall CES leadership to the 4-H program oversight was not highly evident in the context of management of performance measures, although the CES Director attended all the engagement sessions. Fiscal accountability was generally not addressed in the level of detail expected. The CES decision to elect

programs chairs and provide an administrative supplement may work in some areas, but it is difficult to imagine it working in a large statewide volunteer-led program with growth potential. Peter's performance in the area of administrative requirements, which is compensated as a .25 FTE, far exceeds a quarter-time equivalent.

- **Responsibilities:** Program delivery and community engagement are clearly understood and provided; however, leadership workload is excessive relative to compensation. There appears to be a low level of fiscal accountability on behalf of the district leaders to the statewide organization as demonstrated by the "I don't worry about that, I let Peter take care of it." comment from a district leader when asked how the process works.

Internal organizational communications:

- **Communications:** Communication network internal to the 4-H districts with statewide leadership appears to have appropriate networks being available and utilized as demonstrated by the consistent focus areas being addressed in the presentations, monthly meetings, leadership and professional development training opportunities, and overall program assignments being shared throughout the state, and collaboration of new risk management (volunteer training) program implementation. Communication at the district leadership levels of 4-H and their relationship to UA system is not well known throughout the 4-H organization. There seem to be some instances of lack of communication on role clarity related to administrative functions related to CES/4-H.

Planning process for organizational continuous quality improvement:

- **Planning Process for Improvement:** A planning meeting that was held last December prompted this review. A strategic plan was established in 2002 and revised in 2003, but the highlights captured in 2004 are not clearly stated. The advisory council is in place and functional. The 4-H Volunteer Leader's Organization is currently less active.

Climate:

- Districts and programs use formal and informal networks to share information, curriculum, and best practices. However, the opportunities for online communication between volunteer leaders are not shared throughout the organization or, as in many cases, do not exist.
- Uncertainty about availability of resources affects goal setting.
- Lack of understanding generation of revenue(i.e. the process) creates anxiety as to how to plan future programs and creates dependence on grants
- There is a lack of core programs as a platform for revenue generation.
- Lack of unencumbered leadership models results in overworking, burning out, and high turnover rates in key leadership positions.

General Observations:

- It is unclear whether programs are driven by community and societal needs or personal interest. Valued community- and needs- based programs should generate highest level of community stakeholder buy-in to support the programs and mission of the 4-H Districts.
- There appears to be a long history of inconsistent management throughout the statewide system. Outside conditions such as economic changes affecting revenue streams and the University system (including allocation/investment strategies, 4-H leadership and programmatic relationships with decision makers, and organizational restructuring) contribute to the issue.
- Long-term issues related to excessive workloads of agents and leaders, inconsistency of available resources, staff turnover, and financial status awareness reflect a lack of scrutinized oversight of the 4-H program.
- Organizational chart direct lines of reporting are inefficient or outdated. For example, the first and direct line of reporting upward from the statewide leader isn't to the CES Director, but to the CES Advisory Council.
- District agents did not express sufficient fiscal responsibilities for their districts or very little responsibility for reporting of activities.
- District agents are not held to any measurable performance criteria.
- Despite anxiety regarding long-term leadership and the desire to keep their current district leaders from burning out, 4-H programs are flourishing through the dedicated efforts of staff and volunteers.

Recommendations

- Develop a statewide organizational chart that is current for direct and indirect reporting responsibilities and communicate throughout organization.
- Assess workload levels of statewide and district leadership positions and adjust as necessary to fulfill the mission and goals without overworking your leaders.
- Establish performance measures for statewide leadership and district agents that align with agreed upon mission, vision, and goals.
- Develop meaningful and regular performance reviews with statewide leadership and district agents for continuous improvement and feedback.
- Establish relationships with decision makers with revenue influence to market benefits to CRCDC, CES, UAF, UA, and State of Alaska as well as threats and needs.
- Develop organizational sustainability strategies – staffing continuity, a subject matter expert and adjunct instructor list, volunteer training, revenue streams, etc. – aligned with associated UA systems' mission, vision, and strengths.
- Consider investing in a statewide leadership position with exclusive statewide role and responsibilities to focus on broader issues, policies, and administrative responsibilities without reliance on district leadership responsibility.
- CRCDC and CES should provide greater support and oversight to the 4-H program to ensure statewide 4-H leadership performance is maximized. Include performance metrics to ensure expectations are being met.

- The prevailing organizational culture of CES is likely to be a large determinant of the outcomes of this review. It would be advantageous to assess, and discuss at appropriate levels, the culture of CES related to items identified elsewhere in this report (ex: attitudes toward strategic planning, fiscal accountability, volunteerism, engagement state-wide, fee-for-service, etc.)

4-H PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND POLICIES

Overview

We heard a critical need to develop, pilot test, and implement comprehensive and systematic management systems. Many volunteers commented on the fact that different policies are operating from one district to another and that the supporting forms and training processes are inconsistent. The Review Team is encouraged by recent efforts to formalize new approaches and documentation related to risk management and volunteer orientation. They are an important start, but many more areas of program management and policy need to be addressed.

It is clear that .25 FTE with minimal support staff is totally inadequate to provide overall program leadership for the 4-H youth development program in Alaska. The lack of resources dedicated to this role for many years may be the underlying cause of insufficient management systems support at the present time, and without additional resources it is unlikely that the changes and improvements needed by stakeholders and clientele will be adequately addressed. The Review Team wants to commend Peter Stortz for the leadership he is providing and what he is accomplishing on the minimal time his faculty assignment allows for 4-H program leadership.

We recognize that staffing limitations are significant. Setting priorities and focus for the 4-H program core content and delivery systems as a whole will serve staff decision-making on how to most effectively deploy these resources in service of Alaska's young people.

Observations

4-H faculty and staff appear unclear about the vision and goals for the 4-H program as a whole in Alaska, particularly as they relate to Cooperative Extension and UAF strategic vision. 4-H program management may be consistent, but needs to be substantially more strategic in supporting the mission, vision, and goals of Extension and UAF. However, volunteers and staff alike are clear and articulate on the goals of 4-H program with relation to promoting positive youth development for youth participants.

Performance accountability systems are lacking and/or confusing. We are not sure who is responsible for setting staff accountability measures and holding staff to them. There is apparently no clear expectation and format to link 4-H, its name, and emblem to the Cooperative Extension and UAF logos. We were unable to identify an easily accessible operations manual or web site where 4-H policies and procedures are easily accessible for reference by those who need them.

The "official" lines of authority/responsibility are generally understood with the exception of the role of advisory system. What is not clear is whether or not new policies

and procedures are or will be enforced when implementation begins – or who is responsible for compliance.

Some staff and volunteers are implementing policies and core practices differently from one district to another. Although most are calling for statewide consistency, some may be reluctant to relinquish the control required to achieve it.

Staff and volunteers are requesting a statewide event/program calendar, yet there doesn't seem to be an event calendar in place for the 4-H program statewide. We received one district 4-H program calendar and were told that these are sent to the state 4-H program chair. The fact that they are not combined into a state calendar and posted for easy reference on the web is another indication of the need for additional resources to be invested in 4-H program management.

We applaud the recent development of web-based volunteer orientation and training. The volunteer orientation manual being created this summer and fall is an important investment in volunteerism for Alaska 4-H. However, the grant resources for this effort are likely insufficient to the task. Consider adding:

- A style manual to support consistent branding of 4-H in its relationship with Cooperative Extension and UAF.
- Policies that focus on the accountability of faculty and staff for fiscal management and reporting.
- A process for approval to initiate new programs and for producing any materials using 4_h name and emblem (e.g. when does someone need approval beyond the local program?).
- A policy regarding fund development for 4-H.
- A policy regarding the consequences for staff and volunteers not adhering to policies (how do you bring consistency and “enforce” it?).

There is a need to develop Memorandum of Agreement templates for significant partnerships and collaborative arrangements. This had been mentioned in a previous long-range plan.

The confusion and/or lack of awareness of volunteers and some staff related to policies and procedures would suggest that there is a significant communication issue. Training about key policies and practices, easily updated reference documents that are readily available, and repeated reference to the policies is critical to communicating their content, application, and importance.

The review team applauds the recent work the 4-H program chair and UAF risk management officials have accomplished. The draft materials shared during the review represent substantial progress in creating the basis for a statewide management system and providing a safe environment for kids in 4-H. The review team does question the written plan that seems to require annual repetition of paperwork. This seems to be inefficient and burdensome to volunteers.

Recommendations

- Develop a state 4-H strategic plan connected to CES/CRCDD/University plans and individual performance plans for each 4-H staff member that includes specific and measurable objectives for implementing the plan.
- Conduct a 4-H management system audit and develop comprehensive recommendations for creating a statewide system, tools and template, and an implementation plan.
- Move toward the establishment of the State 4-H Program Leader as a full time position, located at UAF, providing more effective communications and program relationships with other CES program leaders and faculty/staff.
- Develop and implement policies and guidelines for fiscal management and provide training to support their effective implementation.
- Document the academic success of 4-Hers as college students. For those who attend UAF, track their academic and other successes in relation to other students.
- Develop a brand/communications style manual and hold all staff accountable for implementing its guidelines.
- Set statewide priorities for program content focus and balanced attention to delivery systems that give attention to all Alaskan young people.
- Establish a systematic review process for new 4-H curriculum that ensures embodiment of the essential elements of 4-H, alignment with national 4-H standards for experiential learning design, and a base in quality research.
- Create a process for systematic review and updating of all policies and procedures on a published timeline.
- Create web-based access to all policies and procedures and, where possible, curricula.
- Create a comprehensive 4-H program operations manual for Alaska 4-H, distribute widely (or on the web), and keep it updated.
- Maximize the use of current technology in communicating policies, forms, and management systems information as well as program implementation details.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Overview

The existent very limited staff resources do not support the development of a viable and sustainable statewide 4-H youth development program. Rather, we learned about numerous independent staff creating and implementing (without any evaluation of effectiveness being offered in most cases) different curricula with different program support opportunities from one Extension District to another. We could not identify common criteria for quality of curricula or the training and program to support it. Staff are spread very thin and do not appear to have core commonly held accountabilities and performance metrics. Some staff are very entrepreneurial, and others seem to be trying to keep up with support of only the basic ongoing traditional 4-H programs that have been offered for many years in their district. In addition, there seems to be high staff turnover and a significant number of staff on soft dollars/term-limited grant funds. These factors do not support the development of a strong and relevant statewide youth development program. The SWOT analysis revealed appreciation for local agents, and equal anxiety about funding for these critical positions.

Observations

Total staff time dedicated to 4-H is a very limited FTE. Accountabilities and performance metrics are unclear or nonexistent. Staff are “drifting” and doing their own programs in the absence of a core 4-H program and clear accountabilities. Without a central 4-H strategic plan and clear accountabilities, it appears that some staff has shifted from empowerment and focus to “drift.”

Recruitment of new staff and professional development of existing staff needs to focus on supporting a blend of the expectations of academia and entrepreneurial ventures that support place-based needs. If fund development and grant support are an expectation of all faculty, they should understand that in the recruitment process. Entrepreneurial efforts must be a stated expectation and supported and recognized. At the same time, the resulting initiatives must fall within the core strategic direction of the overall 4-H program of Alaska. All staff should be expected to participate in consistent orientation and training on the essential elements of 4-H youth development, program development, volunteer development, and Alaska’s 4-H management systems and policies.

Recommendations

- Establish the State 4-H Program Leader as a full time position connecting the program with campus resources to strengthen service to agents and volunteers. This person will then be in a better position to support teams to accomplish core program and administrative functions. The resulting reduction in statewide responsibilities of district agents will allow more time to build and maintain local programs.

- Increase total permanent staff resources dedicated to 4-H. It is important that administrators recognize the most important programmatic uniqueness of 4-H—the program is delivered by volunteers who represent a formidable FTE multiplier for CES/CRCO/UAF. No other CES program is so reliant on recruitment and support of volunteers. This is the primary advantage of maintaining stability in the professional agent positions. The other is the networking and contract and grants development potential.
- Clearly articulate accountabilities and performance metrics in relation to a state 4-H strategic plan and provide coaching and training for staff to develop personal plans with measurable objectives that support the plan.
- Expand and increase the effective application of technology for professional development.
- Develop an ongoing professional development calendar that intentionally supports strengthening key areas needing attention according to this program review.
- Provide professional development opportunities related to:
 - How to fully utilize technology for program delivery
 - Grantsmanship and entrepreneurship
 - How to increase cultural diversity in programs
 - Financial management and accountability
 - Risk management and overall management systems

PROGRAM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Overview

Excellence in program development necessitates that administrators and program staff consider local needs in combination with CES, College of Rural and Community Development, University, state, and national system environmental scans and program priorities as programs are planned. The intentionality of this process linking program conceptualization, planning, implementation, and evaluation requires administrative and program management skill and commitment to prioritization.

Observations

The federal strategic plan submitted for Alaska CES includes elements for 4-H youth development that appear to be in line with needs identified by local citizens, national 4-H, and the university – namely, workforce development, entrepreneurship, and citizenship/leadership. Given the time period it takes to bring programs on line, there seems to be no articulated strategy for how the system intends to plan, implement, and evaluate these programs.

Secondary data that can help to establish priority needs exists. In addition to the needs identification that happens at the local level, state-wide databases and planning documents confirm such needs as: the larger than national average of youth in the state population, outreach to military youth (proportionately large representation in state), high rates of youth suicide, school dropouts, and low percentage of high school graduates entering college (worst in the nation). The 4-H mission of positive youth development can help to address the root causes rather than the symptoms. The expanded outreach of 4-H long-term support systems for youth can be a tremendous asset to the future of the state.

There is evidence of exceptional partnering at the local level. Particularly evident was collaboration with state and federal agencies and non-profit youth serving agencies. Less partnering on a statewide basis with public education was observed.

Outstanding teenagers expressed an interest in greater voice in program planning, particularly as related to shaping statewide programs.

Several districts had functional program planning committees, representative of volunteers, parents, and youth. It was unclear as to the extent to which these types of program development groups were supported as a statewide “best practice”.

On a statewide basis the geographic constraints and overwhelming district programming loads have hampered the effectiveness and timeliness of collaborative planning for statewide programs.

Recommendations

- Science and technology, the content base most important to the mission of the university and identified as a high national priority, should be integrated into specific program plans. Several results of local needs analysis indicated that school systems were in need of partnerships to deliver this high priority content area.
- A representative team of stakeholders (from top to bottom of the organization) should be involved in a prioritization process that intentionally aligns the priorities of 4-H, CES, CRCDC, UAF, State of Alaska, and National 4-H to determine the highest priority 4-H programs for development and support. Arising from these priorities, ad hoc task forces of faculty, district agents, volunteers, partners, and youth who can all be involved in program development. These core programs, delivered in contexts that are proven strategies for knowledge gain and positive youth development, should receive the most attention for statewide planning. 4-H strengths in volunteer-delivered programs, public presentations, recordkeeping, and community service are important workforce and citizenship developers.
- Alaska is also a state with distinctly different regions, population characteristics, and needs. Local entities will need to continue to respond to individual uniqueness within their community through collaborations and external funding. Several successful examples of this type of entrepreneurial approach were noted.
- A concept of “levels of service” is likely needed to respond to the highly divergent needs of urban populations and small remote villages.
 - In Alaska’s most urban cities, strategies need to be developed to reach as many youth as possible with high quality educational content with curricula particularly needed in that market niche. Specific recruitment plans will be necessary to transition some of these youth to more long-term support systems.
 - Likewise, highly targeted content and context specific programs for youth in isolated areas of the state are necessary. Partnerships by CRCDC and state CES leadership are needed to efficiently and effectively reach Alaska’s most rural citizens. For example, intentional connections between programs like the Rural Alaska Honors Institute, the Higher Education USDA grant, and the rural campuses can connect citizens across the state. These programs can benefit by the national resources 4-H can access and the appeal of the 4-H program’s “sense of belonging,” a known contributor to positive youth development. Due to and geographic and staffing constraints, each of these models must have web-based support.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Overview

Major strengths of the content of the Alaska 4-H Youth Development Program include a strong commitment to positive youth development by agents and volunteers regardless of the curricula they are using, the availability of nationally juried curricula, and the entrepreneurial spirit of staff and partners exhibited in the development of such curricula as the natural resources/fisheries material and the “Bug Out!” program. We also heard that some university staff at the state and local levels are providing training, coaching, and other resource support to 4-H.

At the same time, the Review Team must note that a sense of common core curriculum and the required training to support its implementation are missing. Also missing is any substantial effort and/or resources to develop and sustain implementation of curricula to address the unique needs of Alaska’s rural and remote youth.

Observations

Volunteers and staff alike were uneven in their appreciation of the research-based curricula that is unique to the 4-H program. Some were very aware of it and place a high value on it; others seemed to thrive on creating programs themselves with little relation to the research base of the Land Grant University system or UAF in particular. Numerous volunteers indicated that their main source of curricula is 4-H contacts and web sites in other states. Staff seems to support the development of curricula by local volunteers, but there doesn’t seem to be effective communication statewide of what is in development or the standards for development. There is no obvious sharing mechanism for club-to-club programs. Overall, there is a need to be more intentional about creating research-based programs for youth that emphasize the specific needs of youth in Alaska and the future needs of the state. There is a need for CRCDCES/UAF/UA to embrace the added-value of the 4-H program to accomplish their respective missions.

We had ample evidence that youth involved in 4-H are learning and growing as a result of their curriculum experiences. That learning is demonstrated in many ways, but the overall youth audience being reached is very limited in comparison to the total population available to UAF as a public institution. Expanding the youth audience will likely require new programs specific to Alaska’s needs and bringing programs like the fisheries and natural resources curriculum to scale. Both will require additional resources, including support to involve a wide range of people in the priority-setting and development process. Youth and adult volunteers will need to be thoroughly involved in the process of addressing the recommendations related to curricula (and most other categories of recommendations.) A major emphasis must be given to creating a strong youth voice in creating the future programs.

Curriculum training, in keeping with the lack of resources devoted to 4-H as a whole, is available on a limited basis. It does not appear to be systematic or consistent, and we saw no evidence of evaluation of the results of training. Concerns were also voiced about the need for consistency in the use of 4-H record books statewide. In addition, the success of the natural resources and fisheries program suggests that it would be a good candidate to bring to scale in statewide application, but resources are not available to do that even though the program focuses on Alaska's unique culture and economic situation.

Recommendations

- Set statewide priorities for program content focus and balanced attention to delivery systems that give attention to all Alaskan young people.
- Establish a systematic review process for new 4-H curriculum that ensures embodiment of the essential elements of 4-H, alignment with national 4-H standards for experiential learning design, and a base in quality research.
- Determine core 4-H program focus areas for the state and implementation and evaluation approaches that support consistent application statewide. An example might be workforce preparation.
- Create and implement a common statewide record book template and recognition system.
- Expand the application of technology to create program/curricula support systems that unify youth in 4-H throughout the state (e.g. the video presentations for the state 4-H demonstration contest).
- Expand the application of technology in curriculum development and training (and other knowledge areas such as youth development).
- Initiate the development or adoption of new curricula – particular to Alaska – in the areas of science, engineering, and technology and support its implementation with training for 4-H volunteer leaders as well as teachers in remote areas. Bring the natural resources/fisheries program to statewide scale and to the 4-H audience in addition to schools.
- Develop, implement, and evaluate a core program area focused on workforce preparation that relates to 4-H project areas unique to Alaska's workforce needs now and for the future.

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

Overview

Volunteers are the lifeblood of a youth development program as they provide expertise and role models for youth. The SWOT analysis identified volunteer commitment and efforts as the overall strength of the program. Volunteer leaders are recruited for organizational roles in both traditional clubs and special interest-based groups. Federal, state and private sector employees are occasionally called upon to assist agents and leaders. Partnerships established with these individuals (episodic volunteers) play a critical role in the success of several programs. Vision, strategy, and entrepreneurial spirit vary district to district as a result of the cultural, environmental, and political diversity within Alaska.

Observations

Leaders and parents are passionate and vocal in support of their clubs and projects. Agent involvement is seen as a key to success of district 4-H programs.

Volunteer leaders, parents, and youth express frustration when their Agent positions remain unfilled or funded solely through soft money.

The list of responsibilities for the Program Chairman appears to require more than one-quarter time commitment. Agents need to support the Chair and work as a team to implement all new policies and procedures.

This fall, the Program Chairman will unveil a new strategy to insure all participants (staff and volunteers) receive a focused message. Every new and continuing volunteer leader will receive a notebook containing current policy, procedure, and requirements for risk management/background checks. Included will be information about the National 4-H Program and profiles of all State 4-H districts. Volunteers will be offered online educational opportunities to supplement traditional district training.

With agents and volunteers working together as a team, this campaign will help to provide efficient, consistent, and creative support for volunteer leaders across the state.

The role of the Alaska 4-H Volunteer Leader's Organization needs to be clearly understood. This group has been in existence since 1980. It is currently relatively inactive and in need of renewed focus and energy.

Current leaders are a good recruitment tool for finding new leaders.

One of the strengths of 4-H is that it often involves the entire family; this is also a good recruitment tool.

Some volunteer leaders and parents mentioned desire for statewide competition beyond the district level. In Alaska, the system of regional fairs, transportation expense, and local interests do not necessarily result in one final State Fair as is common in other parts of the country. *Note: District demonstrations are video-taped and juried locally. As a method for overcoming travel expenses, the best of the demonstration tapes are judged at the state level. Not all parents were aware of this, and some districts choose not to participate in the statewide judging.*

Recommendations

- Implement new Leader Training as proposed by Program Chair.
- Appoint a task force of a program development committee to work with a state program committee to discuss the role of statewide competition and its impact on young people, programs and budgets. The task force is encouraged to assess other forms of educational programs that increase family participation and meet other developmental needs of teens in particular.
- Encourage teamwork and cooperation among agents and state 4-H leadership to promote a unified statewide agenda so there is a consistent, inspired message for attracting new volunteer leaders.
- Seek partnerships from within UAF to meet the goals and mission statements of 4-H, CES, CRCDC, and UAF.
- Seek support from outside UAF to assist with mission and PR, capitalizing on the entrepreneurial spirit of many agents, volunteers and successful alumni.
- A program development committee representative of volunteers, administrators, agents, faculty, collaborators, and youth is proposed to encourage dialogue among groups, create consensus about vision and programs, and avoid dissension.
- Institute regional program in Alaska similar to “The Art of Leadership Academy” offered by National 4-H Council.
- Increase the use of volunteers for short-term projects. These episodic volunteers can help increase the knowledge base and enthusiasm for a project without the time commitment required of the more traditional volunteer leader.
- Encourage current leaders to recruit new leaders, expanding the force, lessening burnout, and assisting with program continuity.
- Training related to youth/teen empowerment will assist volunteers in listening to messages from teens as they offer guidelines for the direction they see 4-H headed on the local, state, and national level.
- Make it easier for volunteer leaders to utilize educational and professional curriculum training. Encourage UAF to recognize 4-H leaders as volunteer faculty members doing important outreach work on behalf of the university.
- Assist volunteers in fully utilizing resources offered by UAF, UAA, UAS, and other institutions of higher education within the state to emphasize relationship between Alaska and the circumpolar region.
- The Alaska 4-H Volunteer Leader’s Organization should be assisted to focus on many of its intended historic objectives (training, communications, coordination, program continuity, etc.) If “form follows function”, then the organization itself will be stronger as objectives are accomplished.

COMMUNICATIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING

Overview

The 4-H staff and stakeholders believe 4-H is one of the greatest programs for youth. Volunteers and staff are passionate about 4-H. Many invest an extraordinary amount of time. However, in meetings across the state there is the perception that 4-H in Alaska lacks any identifiable link with the university and, in many instances, lacks adequate support from the University. Moreover, in reviewing the written SWOT responses, respondents identified public relations and marketing more than any other issue as the top weakness of the current 4-H program. This is a missed opportunity as 4-H success stories abound in each district. There is no apparent planned link with UAF recruitment efforts to target these youth or maximize student success examples as part of any statewide university/Cooperative Extension (CES) or 4-H marketing communications plan. Many of these 4-H youth are sought by universities throughout the United States. Many of the youth the review team members believe they were better equipped to be competitive for university scholarships and life success because of their involvement with 4-H. This is a powerful testament to the program and a great opportunity for systematic tracking, marketing, and long-term cultivation.

Observations

Constituents identified the need for increased advertising, improved internal communication between and among districts, and better targeted advertising to more accurately depict today's 4-H and its breadth of programming. Stakeholders described possible slogans when they said, "It's more than horses," or "4-H is not just for farmers!" Clearly current program outreach has attracted more young women than boys. Stakeholders see this as a challenge and want help in getting more boys involved. In addition, teens believe the 4-H image needs a facelift to make it more inviting to today's teenagers.

Newsletters are produced by district and when placed side-by-side do not share a common family look to achieve effective branding for 4-H in Alaska as a part of CES and the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Communication is not always timely, especially on the website. Communication does not appear to be coordinated at the statewide level to achieve statewide 4-H objectives, CES objectives, or university-wide goals. Communications about statewide opportunities for youth do not appear to be communicated in any consistent manner.

Issues of website information and access are being addressed – though not at a rapid pace as indicated by current website messages about site development. It is unclear whether

sites under construction are being built by a statewide team to ensure consistent imaging or if they are individual “as time permits” district and club projects.

Independent district driven advertising and marketing collateral is not always consistent with national 4-H guidelines for appropriate branding of 4-H anywhere. The absence of any apparent central CES communication oversight to ensure accurate 4-H branding is an opportunity for future campaigns. There is a newly developed CES logo, thereby providing central CES leadership an opportunity to develop a statewide manual or guidelines to demonstrate how the new logo relates to the university logo and how individual CES programs such as 4-H link with both the CES and UAF logos.

Nationally, 4-H commissioned a survey to build the 4-H brand. Many of the findings of the March 2006 survey compare with what the committee heard and read throughout its visit to a number of districts in Alaska. Freshening the 4-H image and brand; creating more depth around 4-H’s value propositions; equipping leaders, agents, and CES partners with the tools to communicate the 4-H brand; and keeping the brand relevant by developing services for the 21st century and strengthening its presence were key research objectives.

The national survey found that 4-H is top of mind for only one-in-ten Americans though it ranked second among “best” youth development organizations. Lack of knowledge about, not negative association of, 4-H was the main reason 4-H was not more widely perceived by Americans as one of the best youth development organizations. From meetings and written comments throughout this review process, it appears lack of knowledge about 4-H and what it is accomplishing today is a fundamental challenge in Alaska.

Stakeholders expressed interest in improved web based information for districts and leaders. Although the CES website does show improvement with respect to links with UAF, CES remains hidden from the front door – it is a button on a second level of navigation. Once you are on the CES homepage, the links to 4-H web presence for 4-H programs currently lacks cohesion, currency, and any sense of urgency given the promise of summer improvements.

Recommendations

- Create and implement a comprehensive CES-wide integrated marketing/communications program to achieve effective public relations that set the stage for a successful fundraising program.
- Develop guidelines for the use of the CES logo with the UAF logo and 4-H logo with a special emphasis on national 4-H requirements for use of the 4-H logo.
- Launch a high profile “21st century” campaign to increase awareness about 4-H programs today and to increase participation.

- Assess K-12 and 4-H relationships at the highest university and K-12 levels to implement a statewide educational improvement and communications effort with teachers, parents, and youth to keep 4-H in the public eye to remind Alaskans that 4-H is helping youth become Alaska’s future leaders. The Higher Education grant needs assessment indicated that K-12 educators need science and technology curriculum support. They may be unaware of the strength of the national and state 4-H curriculum network.
- Take the “I couldn’t have done it without 4-H” stories and use an appropriate media mix to communicate those stories.
- Address web presence issues as a priority and identify a statewide team to improve all of the 4-H links and ensure each district has an accessible and easy-to-update web page. Plan for timely updates and identify a statewide web team to oversee changes, update, monitor, and improve 4-H web presence with appropriate links to national and related resources.
- Improve communication between and among districts to better identify opportunities for statewide collaboration and basic information sharing.
- Review the district/club independent newsletters with a goal of maximizing information sharing and 4-H successes in a new quarterly statewide 4-H newsletter that can be sent to special audiences such as legislators, prospective sponsors and donors, and alumni. It can be used in recruiting, in fund raising, and to connect leaders and youth as they learn about programs, club competitions, student leadership opportunities, and student get-togethers beyond the district.
- Create a statewide 4-H calendar, include it in every newsletter, and post it on the 4-H front door page.
- Develop a plan to partner with campus and other collaborators to involve teens, particularly high achievers in 4-H, in special educational recruitment opportunities (including time on the UAF campus, lunch with the chancellor, workshops by faculty, and informational sessions by Deans and admissions officials).
- Profile 4-H high achievers in a special ad campaign whereby youth seen having fun, learning, and succeeding on many fronts encourage other youth to join in the fun and improve success in school and life. Involve teens in shaping this campaign.
- Review the national 4-H survey data to align national perceived concerns and issues with the Alaska concerns and issues, and where appropriate, implement national recommendations with an Alaska focus.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Overview

The resource development situation of the 4-H program is symptomatic of many Cooperative Extension systems across the country that have relied on relatively flat or declining federal and state appropriations. Purchasing power has eroded. More than 89% of CES resources are committed to personnel, restricting the ability of the Alaska program to respond to new and emerging high priority needs. "Funding" is recognized in the SWOT analysis as the most critical threat to program continuation. Entrepreneurial efforts, incredible workloads, and volunteer commitment appear to have sustained programs.

Immediate attention to resources is an organizational imperative.

Observations

While the 4-H mission of positive youth development is clearly articulated, there is less evidence of a shared vision and clear measurable goals. Therefore, it is difficult to determine appropriateness of alignment of resource allocations to program impacts.

While Alaska CES suffers more than most other states from lack of locally appropriated public funds, there appears to have been no concerted statewide plan executed for diversifying the funding base.

From the CES perspective, there appear to be core programs that are supported on fragile soft funds, negotiated by local citizens who value the program and will do whatever it takes to maintain a core program presence. This arrangement contributes to staff turnover and lack of consistent support to some of the most ardent supporters of CES and UAF.

The 4-H fund within the university foundation seems to be inactive with little knowledge of its purpose or potential.

No process for accounting for minimum 4-H membership fees was provided, and examples of user-fee supported programs were rare.

Recommendations

- There is potential for growth in resource development, but accountability for budgets and investment in university fund raising and fund management are paramount before any isolated effort gets underway. Delay any plans for a second annual fund drive until clear strategies are executed.
- 4-H program staff at all levels should commit to a process for marketing the value of 4-H to all constituencies. Integrating with a communications and marketing

plan, a resource development campaign should be launched to clearly show that 4-H is:

- **Relevant** to the needs of our communities,
- **Responsive** to the critical issues affecting our youth,
- **Results** oriented,
- **Resource** efficient – fiscally conservative and accountable, and
- Has **Broad Public Appeal** to the citizen/voters.

Professional presentation of this information is needed to elicit positive responses from persons who are motivated by the following different perspectives:

- *Logos* – appeals to the logic of contributing to a program of well-documented effectiveness in creating responsible youth and avoiding costs of negative outcomes such as juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, incarceration, etc.
 - *Ethos* – appeals to the ethics of doing what is morally right to support the development of our next generation of citizens.
 - *Pathos* – appeals to the emotion/heart through real success stories of 4-H products (youth overcoming obstacles to become responsible, high-achieving citizen leaders)
- Develop strategies for identifying current 4-H alumni within Alaska and beyond and recognize them, involve them programmatically, and in program and financial resource development.
 - Review the existing 4-H fund accounts in the University of Alaska Foundation to assess potential for growth and create a plan for the use and distribution of these funds. The Alaska Volunteer Leader’s Organization account should embody the same principles of stewardship and accountability.
 - Use system prioritization process to determine resource allocations. Partner with others in the university system to achieve common program goals through resource sharing (e.g. several university entities have interests in statewide teen programs held on the UAF campus, but all have human and financial resource constraints; 4-H and CES/CRCO should take the lead in pulling these groups together for the common good. This would also be responsive to repeated requests heard locally for more teen leadership opportunities.)
 - Provide university infrastructure and training to support innovation and entrepreneurship; including efficiency of fund management and accessibility, training for grantsmanship and stewardship, and donor prospecting and development. Also explore the feasibility of user fees for programs to offset program costs, ensuring that agents and staff understand the appropriateness of such fees and the importance of stewardship.
 - Consider the opportunities provided by the five rural campuses of UAF for effective engagement with rural youth clientele.
 - Regarding human resources, investigate the potential of UAF program area faculty assignments for relevant youth development programming.

DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND PROGRAM BALANCE

Overview

Rural and remote locations challenge the delivery of 4-H programs across the state. In addition, urban and rural differences sometimes create conflicting priorities among stakeholders. There appears to be a dependence on face-to-face meetings for training and access to resources. There is a statewide enthusiasm among stakeholders for tapping more fully the modern technology that could improve program delivery, information sharing, and links to resources.

Observations

Successful summer camps and focused projects such as Operation Bug Out provide meaningful short-term experiences within districts. Extensive program diversity exists when looking at 4-H as a whole. What remains unclear is whether all programs are needed and which ones are priorities.

Within districts, program diversity appears to be limited to leaders' interests and resources. Teens say they need new experiences beyond projects and want opportunities to get together. Youth needs appear to be defined by faculty and leaders. It is unclear to what extent youth identify needs and help find solutions. There is an awareness of the need to reach new audiences. In Anchorage in particular, where the demographics have changed dramatically in the last ten years, there is an active effort to reach out to new audiences. However, it is unclear whether these new outreach programs achieve the best use of resources that might be allocated to actively seek out and then support new areas of program delivery.

Across the state, intentional strategies to achieve diversity in programming appear lacking. A balance among school enrichment, interest programs, clubs, and camps is uncertain and appears to be more district-driven given leaders' interest and resources.

Links with school districts appear inconsistent across the state with no statewide leadership or vision to ensure lasting relationships and long-term goals and objectives. Districts appear to be left on their own to make things work.

In many instances stakeholders recognize that 4-H is known only for its links to horses and livestock. Parents and leaders explain that sometimes relationships with animals are the best way to motivate youth, instill a sense of responsibility, and improve communication.

Although the Natural Resources program delivered for fifteen years along the Yukon River has been successful, and there have been short-term, science-focused camps elsewhere; it

remains unclear what priority is assigned to math, science, and technology programs for all of 4-H. Is the success of the Natural Resources program an opportunity for tracking student success rates?

The Shooting Sports program, while supported financially through a large grant from the National Rifle Association, might be targeted for elimination based on rumor and the “buzz” at the main campus (an innuendo in one of the SWOT responses). This could create a conflicting message to leaders and stakeholders about UAF’s interest in private support to make programs happen.

Recommendations

- Inventory all programs by district. Track the allocation of resources and percentage of staff support to each. Compare results from a statewide perspective. Are there statewide goals for program delivery that are reasonable given national standards and mandates and university goals and objectives? Where is the imbalance, and what can be done to make adjustments after factoring in district specific differences?
- Set goals at the statewide leadership level for program balance to better link with UAF long-term goals and objectives and national 4-H mandates.
- Evaluate goals annually to track progress and make adjustments.
- Evaluate unmet needs (those not supported given limited resources and lack of alignment with UAF and national goals and objectives) to assess feasibility of private sector support and/or other partnership support.
- Continue the dialogue with all districts from a statewide perspective to achieve improved understanding of the statewide vision and decision-making to ensure program balance is achieved, communicated, and understood. Regular feedback from stakeholders as it relates to a statewide picture of 4-H could mitigate excessive and unrealistic demands at the district level.
- Where districts have achieved significant exemplary programs CES statewide leadership should explore ways to deliver to other areas as interest and need develops. The guide dog program, Operation Bug Out, and perhaps the dog mushing curriculum are not only of value to their district but can become national prototypes for success. In addition, the impact of intensive district specific programs on overall distribution of resources requires consideration through appropriate accountability measures. For example, the dog guide program though labor intensive and small in number, is making a difference in Alaska – it is unlikely to ever have hundreds of participants in such a program.
- Develop a plan for private support to channel private dollars to unmet needs and interest specific programs.

TECHNOLOGY UTILIZATION

Overview

Based on observations by panel members, volunteers, leaders, staff, and students, there are key areas which particularly help to shed light on technology utilization within CES's 4-H Alaska-based program. They include:

- Enthusiasm for new media technologies
- Lack of statewide uniformity in coordinating new media messages
- Website challenges

Observations

Panel members, volunteers, leaders, staff, and students embrace utilizing new media (i.e. CD-ROMs, internet, e-mail, listservs, and DVDs). In fact, stakeholders appear more technology ready than staff in some locations. Technology is seen as providing a unique opportunity to recruit and inform. Volunteers have discussed the improved delivery of curriculum for students using the internet. Staff report awareness of the need to use new technology, and efforts are underway to improve message delivery to internet audiences. Students would like to be more aware of 4-H projects throughout Alaska and beyond. All groups recognize there is room for improvement.

Recruitment methods with a newly developed CD-ROM were demonstrated in Anchorage. However, its distribution will be delayed because of non-conformity with national 4-H standards for use of the 4-H logo and lack of pre-approval for use of a soundtrack. While such entrepreneurial efforts are to be commended, there is a need for CES assistance to ensure that national standards are met, copyright clearances are obtained, and efforts are rewarded.

Teens report 4-H should use new technology to better link teens and recruit teens.

Stakeholders and review team members noted the missing link between 4-H and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The UAF website home page does not have an obvious link with CES, and the UAF link on the CES website, which is undergoing improvement, is under construction. Some 4-H parents and volunteers were unable to identify the connection with the university and therefore noted they would not have known to look at its website for 4-H information. Additionally, for those that had pursued information at UAF's website, there were levels of links that made the experience frustrating, which is then compounded with a message on all but one 4-H link that the sites are under construction with a promise of improvement by "this summer."

The Anchorage-based program's CD-ROM clearly identifies their projects and mission. Is this a format that can be emulated for other Alaskan programs with minor changes?

Recommendations

- Improve use of technology by staff through intensive professional development. Stakeholders and participants must be able to count on district offices and statewide resources, or they will find it in other states.
- Create an online statewide calendar of events for an improved awareness of events and to promote underused statewide opportunities for youth.
- Explore e-mail systems for 4-Hers and listservs for leaders and staff for training and curriculum development.
- Use CD-ROMs/DVDs for increased recruitment opportunities. Create a statewide CD to promote 4-H programs in Alaska for use by all districts. Add it to the website.
- Explore rates and viewer polls to determine cost-effectiveness of ads during movies throughout movie houses in Alaska.
- Some states have a 4-H Technology Team who function as a virtual team (under the leadership of a university contact) to keep 4-H on the cutting-edge. There are alumni, staff, volunteers, and youth who are passionate about the program and new technologies.
- Explore whether the increased use of technology can provide the additional support needed for long-term “community clubs” rather than more specialized interest projects. Stakeholders noted distance between members even within one area impedes “community clubs.”
- Use the web to recruit new members and track efforts over a certain time period.

DIVERSITY

Overview

Alaska is a very diverse state in many realms – geographically, climatically, ethnically, culturally, and economically. A worthy goal for 4-H in Alaska is to increase the visibility of the 4-H brand as an excellent youth development program and at the same time ensure program diversity and viability in the 21st Century. As a publicly funded entity, CES has a responsibility to intentionally plan for the inclusion of traditionally underserved audiences. Supporting this, the SWOT analysis listed greater targeting and support for diverse programs as having the greatest opportunity to have a greater impact on Alaskan youth. The 4-H Youth Development program can provide UAF with a link to all Alaskan students in public, private and home-school situations in a variety of rural and urban settings.

Observations

The Alaskan 4-H program is currently most strongly based in four major fields – agriculture/market animals, fisheries recourse, horsemanship, and military youth outreach. Agents and leaders have nurtured partnerships from inside and outside the university system to encourage success in these areas.

Other examples of innovative programs include: First Responders, Dog Training/Pet Care, Music/Arts and Crafts, Outdoor Skills, Sports/Karate/Skiing/Running, and Natural Resource Education.

Districts support specific programs due to social, political, and economic factors within the area.

Political systems and organizations tend to plan on short-term program or budget cycles. However, the diverse needs of youth for their successful functioning for the next fifty to seventy-five years require a focus on developing real life skills.

Situations arise that seem monumental in one district but are irrelevant in another. For example, in the agricultural field, districts may not agree on the solution to the pending closure of slaughter facilities. What happens when the relationship between the Fair board, school district, and youth with 4-H market animals is compromised? Dealing with a difference of opinion within or between districts can be a challenge for staff and volunteers.

Youth today have technical skills (computer technology; digital, visual, and audio communication expertise) that make their lives very different from youth a few years ago. Teen volunteers often take the time to bring adult leaders up to speed.

UAF strives to be on the cutting edge of Arctic research, and 4-H needs to be there too. Alaska 4-H can add value by growing in its capability to develop curriculum specific to the Arctic region.

Youth who have participated in 4-H become some of the most successful college students. Alaska depends on 4-H graduates to be among the successful teachers, doctors, lawyers, politicians, and scientists. The link between 4-H and UAF is a vital to both and marketable as a tool towards assuring a brighter future for Alaska.

Recommendations

- Expand traditional programs. Actively support new and non-traditional programs with curriculum specific to Arctic Region – meeting the science, technology, workforce, health, and citizenship needs of its citizens.
- Market 4-H as a tool to enrich and expand the role of UAF/CRCO and the entire statewide system of higher education in the lives of youth not currently involved in 4-H.
- More fully integrate CES Consumer Science and Land Resource staff time and program material into the 4-H Program.
- Continue to seek partnerships with other state, federal, private sector, and non-profit entities to expand program diversity.
- Expand ideas for continuing educational opportunities for volunteer leaders and leadership opportunities for teens and young adults. Teen leadership development and service project completion were very frequently mentioned in the SWOT analysis as important mechanisms for workforce preparation and citizenship skill development.
- Develop curriculum specific to Arctic research and to life in bush and urban Alaska.
- Encourage youth, volunteer leaders, and staff to reach beyond local concerns to visualize and respond to state, national, and international present and anticipated future conditions.
- Utilize science and technology to assure 4-H is actually meeting the needs, concerns, and aspirations of youth in Alaska.
- Actively seek new volunteer leaders in traditional and non-traditional programs particularly bush and urban environments.
- Alaska 4-H is in a position to showcase the incredible diversity of the state to other youth throughout the nation. 4-H youth from other parts of the country could be encouraged to attend Alaskan institutions of higher education. Students coming from outside Alaska bring a new energy and inspire greater diversity within the state. The same can be said when Alaskan 4-H Youth spread out across the nation and around the world.