

# MOTIVATION AND RECOGNITION PREFERENCES OF 4-H VOLUNTEERS

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## Abstract

*This study explored motives and identified strategies for service recognition of a sample (714) of Nebraska 4-H organizational and project volunteer leaders. On average, volunteers sampled were 43 years of age, parents of children in 4-H, and had been involved as a 4-H member more than 7 years. Respondents were predominately motivated by affiliation, and, therefore, identified most strongly with volunteering because of a desire to help others, associate with youth, and to be with their children involved in 4-H. Volunteers preferred to be recognized for their service by 4-H members in various forms. No relationship was established between motives to volunteer and preferred forms of recognition.*

## Introduction

Imagine focusing 4.5 million hours of service annually on a common national initiative. The potential of this volume of service impacting change is almost staggering. According to statistics prepared by the Implications of Volunteerism in Extension project (IVE, 1984), 4-H volunteers commit 4.5 million hours annually to 4-H members. In Nebraska alone, 17,000 4-H volunteers served approximately 122,000 youth ages 5-19 in a variety of educational settings. These Nebraska youth are members of 28,000 organized 4-H clubs throughout the state (Nebraska State 4-H Office, 1999).

Who are these volunteers? Does 4-H attract volunteers who have a common reason or motivation for volunteering? What kinds of recognition do these volunteers appreciate for their service?

4-H volunteers are a key component of the 4-H program. Research by Snider (1985)

concluded that a team of committed, trained volunteers and extension professionals has more impact on leadership, service, and delivery of programs than the agent who doesn't share ownership and responsibility with trusted volunteers. In counties where volunteers assume leadership in the 4-H program the following results: (1) a stronger 4-H program, (2) clearer understanding of 4-H goals, (3) more volunteer ownership, (4) greater program diversity, and (5) increased support for 4-H (Snider, 1985). Snider believes strong volunteer leader involvement will strengthen the 4-H program around the world. Consequently, local program quality is, to a great extent, a reflection of the involvement of organizational and project volunteers.

Given the crucial role of volunteers in 4-H, 4-H programming must address the development (e.g. recruitment and retention) of volunteer resources. A key component of this development is awareness of the primary motivation of volunteers and effective means of recognizing them (O'Connell, 1976; Penrod, 1991).

## Motivation

Motivation has been an emphasis in behavioral research throughout the past fifty years. Motivation has been examined extensively using several taxonomies (Alderfer, 1968; Barbuto & Scholl, 1998; Maslow, 1943; McClelland, 1961). One of the most widely used in research and practice is McClelland's trichotomy of needs. The theory proposes that individuals are motivated by one of three sources: achievement, affiliation, or power (McClelland, 1961). Achievement is described as working toward something only to achieve a goal or dream. Achievement is trying to accomplish something with great effort, skill or perseverance. Affiliation is described as establishing, maintaining, or restoring a positive affective relationship with another person. This relationship is described mostly by the word "friendship." Other statements associated with affiliation are "liking," or "the desire to be liked" or "accepted by someone." Approval-seeking is a high priority of a person motivated by a need for affiliation. The need for power is described as the control or the influence of the thoughts of a person or a group of individuals (McClelland, 1970; McClelland & Burnham, 1976; Yukl, 1998).

Atkinson (1977) extended the inquiry that McClelland initiated regarding the trichotomy of needs. McClelland and Atkinson suggested that "people behave as they do because they believe their behavior will lead to a desired reward or goal" (Hampton, et. al., 1982). The trichotomy of needs is based on the proposition that people make choices about volunteering according to their goals or needs and whether the volunteering will lead to the goals (Henderson, 1981).

## 4-H Volunteerism

Reasons for 4-H volunteerism have been studied over the years by several researchers. Some of the earliest research was completed by Brown and Boyle (1964) and identified 4-H

volunteers' own children as their primary motivation to volunteer. Later, ACTION (1974) and Parrot (1977) both concluded volunteers' desire to help people, their sense of duty, and their enjoyment of the experience were most frequently cited motivators.

Henderson (1981) studied 200 adult 4-H volunteers (club leaders, project leaders, activity leaders, committee members and other leaders) and found that the primary reasons for volunteerism were (1) opportunities to be with their own children, (2) desire to help others, and (3) a desire to associate with youth. Also, affiliative outcomes were reported as being most motivating. The least motivating reasons were (1) perceptions that participation might lead to employment, (2) that volunteering would provide an opportunity to influence others, and (3) that volunteering might bring recognition. Reasons for participation that were highest ranked were seen as priority issues for paid staff to consider. Henderson recommended that attempts be made to help volunteers to gain what they want from their volunteer experience.

A more recent study (Rouse & Clawson, 1992) of volunteers 50 years of age or older, measuring the McClelland's trichotomy of needs using the instrument developed by Henderson (1981), determined that older adults were predominantly motivated by achievement and affiliation rather than by power. Although the study of Smith and Bigler (1985) was not linked to motivation theory as that of Henderson's (1981), their study of Ohio 4-H volunteers concluded the strongest motivating force for volunteers to become 4-H leaders was having been asked to volunteer by a current 4-H leader.

## Recognition

Once 4-H volunteers are recruited, what are their preferred means of recognition for their service? Recognition is a key consideration in step

four (perpetuating) of a structured means of guiding volunteers (L-O-O-P) developed by Penrod (1991). Attention to recognition of volunteers can be the difference between retaining or not retaining volunteers. For instance, in a study of Ohio continuing and discontinuing 4-H volunteers conducted by Smith and Bigler (1985), continuing volunteers reported higher incidents of tangible recognition, and they had more frequent attendance at recognition programs than discontinuing volunteers.

A recent study of Ohio 4-H volunteers who were attending a 4-H recognition luncheon found that “receiving plaques, certificates, pins, etc.” and “recognition banquet or luncheon” were the most frequently cited county-based components of volunteer recognition (Culp & Schwartz, 1999). The study also concluded the most meaningful source of recognition was 4-H members, and the most frequently cited meaningful types of recognition were a thank you note from the extension agent and a thank you note from a 4-H'er. However, a thank you note from a 4-H'er, while much lower in frequency rank, received the highest mean score.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

Penrod (1991) argued that the volunteer recognition process is most meaningful when it is linked to volunteers' motivational patterns. To date, this linkage between meaningful forms of volunteer recognition and volunteer motives has not been made. This study examined the motives of 4-H volunteers and identified strategies for recognition by:

1. classifying demographics of respondents (e.g., age, number of children, number of children in 4-H, annual hours spent volunteering, education level);
2. identifying preferred forms of recognition;

3. analyzing primary motivation of volunteers using statements and subscales based upon McClelland's trichotomy (achievement, affiliation, power) of needs; and
4. exploring the relationship between primary motivation of 4-H volunteers and most preferred forms of recognition.

### **Procedures**

#### Sample

The population for this study was defined as all Nebraska 4-H organizational and project leaders. Addresses for the 737 organizational and 1,242 project leaders were secured from the Nebraska State 4-H Office in the spring of 1999. Using a stratified, random sampling strategy (i.e., percentage of organizational and project leaders, and region), 264 organizational and 450 project leaders ( $n=714$ ) were sampled across the five regions of the state.

#### Procedures and Instrumentation

Preferred forms of recognition were measured using 19 demographic and attitudinal items from an instrument developed by Culp and Schwartz (1999). The 19 items featured a mix of Likert-type five point scales, rank ordering and frequency counts. Motivation was measured using 27 statements (based on McClelland's trichotomy of needs theory, 1961) which featured Likert-type scales (7=Agree, 4=Neutral, 1=Disagree) developed by Henderson (1981). (The 27 statements were later collapsed into the three primary motivation subscales of achievement, affiliation and power.) The instrument was reviewed by a panel of University of Nebraska Extension faculty and graduate students to establish reliability.

Two weeks after the first mailing of a cover letter, coded instrument, and return,

postage-paid envelope, 210 respondents had returned instruments. Two weeks after receiving a postcard reminder, 92 additional respondents had returned instruments. Using the recommended procedure for follow-up of Miller and Smith (1983) of contacting a random sample of nonrespondents, 100 non-respondents were sent instruments and return, postage-paid envelopes. This procedure yielded 28 more responses. In total 330 instruments were received with a return rate of 46%. First, second and third respondent groups were compared, and no significant differences were found among their demographic, rank ordering or attitudinal responses. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for internal consistency for the motivation items was .89; motivation subscale Cronbach's alphas ranged from .82 to .88.

### **Analysis of Data**

The data were analyzed using SAS. Descriptive statistics, collapsing of items into subscales, as well as Chi-Square (e.g. Kruskal-Wallis and Wilcoxon tests) comparisons were made.

The average age of the respondents was 43 (see Table 1). They had an average of 2.88 children, with 1.94 ranging from ages 9 to 19. A majority of the respondents (318 of the 330) reported 2.5 of the children are or have been 4-H members. This finding is similar to Whaples and Bordelon (1983) study in which over 90% of the responding 4-H volunteers had children in 4-H. Annually, the respondents spend an average of 57 hours as a 4-H volunteer, less when compared to the average of 200 hours reported by volunteers in a 1970 study by Banning. 4-H volunteers also were affiliated with an average of three other volunteer organizations. Seventy percent of the respondents had been 4-H members, with an average of 7.4 years of involvement. Banning's (1970) study found that slightly more than 50% of the respondents had been 4-H members.

The majority (38.5%) of the respondents' highest level of educational attainment was a high school diploma, while 10.5% had associate degrees, and 27.7% had bachelors' degrees. All respondents had at or above a high school education; in the study of Smith and Bigler (1985) 90% of the responding 4-H volunteers were high school graduates and above. Both the most frequently cited and highest mean rank of the most appealing form of 4-H leader recognition was "letter from 4-H members (see Table 2)." Second in frequency, but third in mean rank, was a "phone call from 4-H members." Third in frequency, but 13<sup>th</sup> in mean rank, was "coverage in the newspaper." The least appealing forms of leader recognition by mean rank and frequency were "visit from the extension educator," "recognition at the State Fair or Roundup," and "phone call from the extension educator."

Two motivation attitudinal statements tied for highest mean score, "I am a 4-H volunteer because I like helping people," and "I am a 4-H volunteer because I like associating with youth (see Table 3)." The statement "I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to be with my child(ren) in the 4-H program" was the third highest rated statement. All three statements were in the affiliation subscale category.

The three lowest rated attitudinal statements were "I am a 4-H volunteer in order to gain experience and skills which might lead to employment," "I am a 4-H volunteer because I like to receive recognition for being a volunteer," and "I am a 4-H volunteer because I can't say 'no' when I'm asked." These three statements were in the subscale categories of achievement, power, and affiliation, respectively. After collapsing the attitudinal statements into subscales, the results indicated that respondents were primarily motivated by affiliation, followed by achievement and power. This result mirrors the findings of Henderson's (1981) study of Minnesota 4-H volunteers.

Table 1. 4-H Volunteer Status and Age of Respondents

Leader status	Age					Total
	15-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	
Organizational	6(2%)	33(10%)	73(22%)	15(4.5%)	5 (1.5%)	132(40%)
Project	17(6%)	46(14%)	96(29%)	26(8%)	11(3%)	196(60%)
Total	23(8%)	79(24%)	169(51%)	41(12.5%)	16(4.5%)	328 <sup>a</sup> (100%)

<sup>a</sup>Two respondents did not identify their age.

Table 2. Most Appealing Forms of Leader Recognition

Form of recognition	<u>M</u>				Frequency rank
	Rank	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	
Letter from 4-H members	1	3.84	1.36	173	1
Visit from 4-H members	2	3.59	1.35	93	8
Phone call from 4-H members	3	3.54	1.34	128	2
Receiving plaques, certificates, pins	4	3.32	1.39	111	5
Formal recognition banquets	5	3.25	1.69	71	13
Visit from parents	6	3.21	1.28	72	12
At your club's annual Achievement Program	7	3.17	1.52	89	9
At a ceremony held during the county fair	8	3.05	1.27	80	10
Phone call from parents	9	3.02	1.25	97	7
Letter from the Extension Educator	10	2.99	1.41	112	4
Letter from parents	11	2.95	1.24	107	6
Information recognition (at a meeting)	12	2.90	1.49	78	11
Coverage in the newspaper	13	2.84	1.45	116	3
Visit from the Extension Educator	14	2.83	1.54	29	16
Recognition at the State Fair or Roundup	15	2.80	1.35	35	15
Phone call from the Extension Educator	16	2.61	1.39	51	14

Note. Respondents asked to identify top 5 and ranking 5=most appealing, 4=second most appealing.

Table 3. 4-H Volunteer Responses to Motivation Attitudinal Statement and Subscale Frequencies, Means and Standard Deviations (n=330)

Subscales and attitudinal statements	Disagree 1-3	Neutral 4	Agree 5-7	<u>M</u>	SD
<b>Affiliation Subscale</b>				5.9	.78
I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to be with my child(ren) in the 4-H program	27(8.2%)	27(7.6%)	278(84.2%)	6.14	1.47
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like helping people	5(1.5%)	17(5.2%)	308(93.3%)	6.15	1.02
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like associating with youth	10(3.1%)	13(3.9%)	307(93%)	6.15	1.03
I am a 4-H Volunteer because it is a way I can express my caring and concern for others	12(3.6%)	46(13.9%)	272(82.5%)	5.63	1.17
Volunteering in 4-H gives me a chance to meet other volunteers	36(10.9%)	89(27%)	205(62.1%)	4.99	1.37
As a 4-H volunteer, I prefer to work with groups of people rather than alone	49(14.8%)	99(30%)	182(55.2%)	4.76	1.57
I am a 4-H volunteer because I feel needed in the program	39(11.8%)	62(18.8%)	229(69.4%)	5.14	1.47
As a 4-H volunteer, it is important to me that people like me.	77(23.3%)	88(26.7%)	165(50%)	4.45	1.69
I am a 4-H volunteer because I can't say "no" when I'm asked	168(51%)	71(21.5%)	91(27.6%)	3.24	1.88
<b>Power Subscale</b>				4.59	0.09
I volunteer because I want to have influence on how young people learn and grow	9(2.7%)	19(5.8%)	302(91.5%)	6.12	1.09
I am 4-H volunteer because I want to teach and lead others	12(3.6%)	44(13.3%)	274(83.1%)	5.62	1.21
I like being involved in the leadership of the 4-H program	13(3.9%)	59(17.9%)	258(78.2%)	5.54	1.21
I volunteer because I like to be involved in making decisions and program planning	60(18.2%)	95(28.8%)	175(53%)	4.73	1.50
(table continues)					

Subscales and attitudinal statements	Disagree 1-3	Neutral 4	Agree 5-7	<u>M</u>	SD
<b>Power Subscale (con'd)</b>				4.59	0.09
As a 4-H volunteer, I enjoy being able to “do my own thing”	67(20.3%)	91(27.6%)	172(52.1%)	4.63	1.53
I volunteer in 4-H because I like to be responsible for 4-H programs	66(20%)	117(36%)	147(44.5%)	4.39	1.42
I receive status in my community because I am a 4-H volunteer	143(43%)	112(34%)	75(22.7%)	3.49	1.69
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like to receive recognition for being a volunteer	177(54%)	110(33%)	43(13.1%)	2.97	1.58
I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to have influence over others	134(41%)	85(25.8%)	111(33.6%)	3.69	1.84
<b>Achievement Subscale</b>				4.85	.85
I volunteer in 4-H because it is a way to improve my community	12(3.6%)	39(11.8%)	279(84.6%)	5.78	1.22
I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to learn new things	10(3.1%)	47(14.2%)	273(82.7%)	5.64	1.19
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like the challenge of the task	24(7.3%)	83(25.2%)	223(67.5%)	5.15	1.34
As a 4-H volunteer, I have goals for what I want to accomplish as a volunteer	30(9.1%)	87(26.4%)	213(64.6%)	5.09	1.30
I am a 4-H volunteer because it is a constructive use of my leisure time	71(21.5%)	85(25.8%)	174(52.7%)	4.57	1.64
As a volunteer, I like to receive feedback from members about how I am doing	38(11.5%)	79(23.9%)	213(64.5%)	5.07	1.50
I am a 4-H volunteer because it is a task I can do well	32(9.7%)	104(32%)	194(58.8%)	4.95	1.29
I am a volunteer because I feel an obligation to 4-H because of what it has done for me	91(27.6%)	82(24.8%)	157(47.6%)	4.42	1.89
I am a volunteer in order to gain experience and skills which might lead to employment	199(60%)	73(22.1%)	58(17.6%)	2.86	1.85

Note. Likert-type scale 1=Disagree, 4=Neutral, 7=Agree.

No significant (.05) relationships were found among respondents' motivation subscale means and their most appealing forms of recognition. This finding was not expected for it was anticipated that a 4-H volunteers' motives would predict their preferred forms of reward (Penrod, 1991).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Individuals who are approaching middle age are most likely to volunteer. They have been involved with 4-H, on the average, for a large portion of their eligible member years. They generally have a personal stake in the success or failure of the 4-H club for which they volunteer because they have or have had children involved in 4-H. Therefore, recruitment efforts need to be focused at parents of current 4-H members as well as 4-H alumni. Further research should be conducted to determine if the percentage of volunteers who have not been 4-H members has dropped in other states and nationally, with emphasis on determining if those who have not had the 4-H experience differ in their motives for volunteering.

The lack of relationship among the respondents' motivational subscale means and their most appealing forms of recognition may be explained by the general reputation-based forms of recognition described, seemingly affiliative in nature. Because all forms of recognition represented in the Culp and Schwartz (1999) instrument appear to tap into a volunteer's need for affiliation, a volunteer's relative strength of the three needs (achievement, affiliation and power) would have little bearing on which methods were preferred.

While a majority of the 4-H volunteers have some exposure to post-secondary education, the largest percentage have a high school education. Therefore, assumptions regarding background in college-level sciences, math, etc.

that could be made in volunteer training by extension educators should be avoided.

While perhaps not a valid comparison (state to national study results), it is certainly noteworthy that the average 4-H volunteer leader in this study was committing almost 75% less time than the 4-H volunteer leader of 1970. In thirty years, volunteers may be committing more of their discretionary time to other organizations rather than 4-H; perhaps 4-H is not asking as much of today's volunteers, or perhaps volunteers are reluctant to give up their personal time. This question of service commitment has implications for expectations of 4-H volunteer leaders and their expectations of involvement, and bears exploring through a replication of Banning's (1970) national study.

In Nebraska, 4-H volunteers want personal recognition given by 4-H members, and efforts should be made to insure that this personal recognition occurs. Therefore, a critical component of projects popular with young 4-H members should include exposure to options for recognition of those who make the members' participation possible (volunteer leaders, extension educators, parents, siblings).

Two forms of recognition associated with direct communication by extension educators (i.e., visit and phone call) were among the least appealing to respondents. Volunteers may not identify 4-H as the youth component of a larger Extension program, and, therefore, do not connect their 4-H service with the efforts led by extension educators. Consequently, they would not value the recognition they would receive from the extension educator. Extension educators should be encouraged to focus on establishing the linkage between the 4-H program and the remainder of the extension program, and on building stronger relationships with volunteers.

The forms of recognition (Culp &

Schwartz, 1999) used by extension educators are predominately associated with affiliation, and while they will appeal to most volunteers, some volunteers may not feel adequately recognized. This inadequacy could lead to volunteers discontinuing their service. A broad range of recognition strategies should be identified for extension educators to incorporate into their volunteer program.

A vast majority of respondents agreed that they were 4-H leaders for the purpose of learning new things. 4-H leaders would be an excellent market for extension education. Linking the training to ways 4-H volunteers could enhance member learning would be particularly advantageous.

4-H volunteers are members of several other organizations. Extension educators should be encouraged to explore ways to capitalize on volunteers' networks beyond Extension. These networks could be a valuable, community-based means of strengthening 4-H clubs through local multi-organization initiatives and general program awareness.

4-H volunteers will continue to play a key role in the success of 4-H clubs for years to come. Therefore, it is important that careful consideration be given to volunteer recruitment and recognition.

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