

# MOTIVATING AND RETAINING ADULT VOLUNTEER 4-H LEADERS

Ken Culp, III, Assistant Professor  
The Ohio State University

## Abstract

*Highly motivated volunteers can greatly extend organizational and programmatic outreach to involve audiences which may otherwise be unserved. Determining what motivates individuals to volunteer is a key component of volunteer administration. The purpose of this study was to identify the motivators of adult volunteer 4-H Leaders and to determine if positive and negative motivations were similar for current and former 4-H volunteers. Findings from this study revealed three primary motivations which influence people to volunteer: Youth (issue/cause motive), the 4-H Program (affiliation motive) and Perceived Need (personal motive). Two negative motivators were found for current and former 4-H volunteers and included a lack of adult assistance, (which volunteers coupled with feelings of being unwanted or unneeded); and a lack of time and employment conflicts.*

Understanding what motivates individuals to volunteer is a key component of volunteer administration (Murk & Stephan, 1990). The relationship between volunteers and the organizations they serve is defined by two elements: volunteer motivations and organizational needs. The point of contact between volunteer motivations and organizational needs is the actual volunteer experience, which has the potential to satisfy the needs of both the organization and the volunteer (Balenger, Sedlacek, & Guenzler, 1989). Volunteers serve an organization because they expect certain motivational needs to be met during the process of volunteering (Balenger, et al.). Clarifying the reasons and motivations prompting volunteerism is one means of attempting to stimulate volunteer involvement. Each volunteer experience and involvement is accompanied by the individual's own expectations and is precipitated by unique personal motivators (Henderson, 1980). Ascertaining these unique personal motivators and expectations can contribute to providing volunteers with a satisfactory and rewarding experience.

Henderson (1981) determined that most volunteers were motivated by the need for affiliation. An affiliation motive influences a person to be most concerned about his or her

relationships with the organization and other people (Atkinson & Birch, 1978). Similarly, Rouse and Clawson (1992) determined that the vast majority (85.5%) of youth volunteers agreed that they wanted to "spend time with youth." Identifying and learning to fulfill personal volunteerism motivations may reduce turnover by improving volunteer satisfaction and retention. Retention is best accomplished through the development of feelings of importance and belonging to a particular agency. If the volunteer's role is not perceived as being of value to the operation of that agency, the longevity of volunteer service to the agency will be shortened (Murk & Stephan, 1990).

Similarly, Rohs (1986) produced evidence which indicated that both continued participation and length of service were positively affected by the attractiveness of 4-H to the volunteer leader. Rohs therefore determined that leader retention efforts should emphasize the individual benefits (attractiveness) a person may realize from being a 4-H volunteer leader. However, in a study conducted in Germany, Zeuschel and Hansel (1989) found that parents were most often ready to volunteer in efforts benefitting their own children. They identified a distinct pattern of moving from one volunteer position to the next as parents, mostly

mothers, accompany their children through different educational experiences from kindergarten through secondary school.

Rohs and Lee (1989) observed a one-third annual turn-over rate in 4-H volunteers, meaning that in order to maintain volunteer numbers, a new cadre of volunteers must be identified, recruited, screened, selected, and educated every three years. These processes demand a considerable amount of time from the Extension Educators or Volunteer Administrator. Learning how to increase volunteer retention and improve motivational techniques would enable Extension Educators and volunteer coordinators to devote more time to program management.

Rohs and Lee (1989) called for a more thorough understanding of the factors associated with individual volunteer participation in the 4-H program as a means of enhancing retention and involvement in 4-H. Each year, Extension Educators spend countless hours recruiting, orienting, educating, developing and supporting new volunteers. Improving volunteer retention would provide additional time for Extension professionals to devote to program support and development by reducing the time which they devote to volunteer management. It is necessary, therefore, to study the motives contributing to 4-H volunteerism, determine how the motives for initiating, continuing and discontinuing are different and determine why negative motives led to volunteer resignation in discountinuers but did not in continuing volunteers.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to identify the motivators of adult volunteer 4-H leaders. The objectives of this study were to:

- ◆ Identify the motivators for beginning service as a volunteer 4-H Leader.

- ◆ Identify the motivators for continued service as a volunteer 4-H Leader.
- ◆ Identify negative motivators and determine which negative motivators led to discontinuation of 4-H Leader's volunteer service.
- ◆ Determine if positive and negative motivators were similar for current and former volunteer 4-H Leaders.

### **Procedures**

#### Population and Sample

The population for this study included all adult volunteer 4-H leaders in Indiana, during 1994 (current leaders), and all former adult volunteer 4-H leaders in Indiana who had provided short-term service (three years or less, within the past five years) before terminating their position. The population was divided into three distribution layers for this study. The three layers were identified as follows: Cooperative Extension Service (CES) geographical Area, County Population and 4-H/Youth Development Extension Educator Stability within the county. At least one county from each of the ten CES Areas was included in the sample. County population was defined as rural (less than 50,000), suburban (50,000 to 100,000) and urban (over 100,000). Representative of Indiana's population, two urban, two suburban and nine rural counties were randomly selected.

Extension Educator Stability was defined as: high stability (20 years or more of service as an Extension Educator - 4-H/Youth Development in the same county), low stability (three or more Extension Educators - 4-H/Youth Development within the past seven years) and moderate stability (intermediate between low and high.) After satisfying the three stratification layers, the sample, which was representative of Indiana's population and Extension Educator stability levels, yielded 13 randomly selected counties. The Extension

Educator - 4-H/Youth Development in each of the 13 counties submitted their 4-H leader mailing lists, as well as identifying ten or more former 4-H leaders. The sample consisted of 1055 current and 128 former leaders from the thirteen randomly selected counties. The resulting sample was surveyed comprehensively.

### Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data were collected via two four page survey instruments, one designed for current 4-H leaders and a second, a duplicate with slight wording modifications (which mostly consisted of changing tenses from present to past) was distributed to former 4-H leaders. The surveys were adapted from instruments utilized by Denmark (1971) and Parrott (1977). Face validity was established by a panel of five experts, including Departmental Extension Coordinators, State 4-H Specialists, and Education Administrators. In addition, the instruments were field tested with a group of nine current and two former 4-H leaders for content validity.

Reliability was established by testing the instrument with a group of 20 Ohio 4-H volunteers in post-hoc. Cronbach alpha values ranged from .52 to .87 (mean=.69) for initiation, .60 to .83 (mean=.75) and .58 to .81 (mean=.72) for continuation and discontinuation motives, respectfully. The instruments contained 60 questions, 52 of which were descriptive or quantitative and eight which were open-ended. Surveys were mailed to volunteers with follow-up postcards being mailed five weeks later to non-respondents. The final response rate was 46.83% (N=494) for current and 31.25% (N=40) for former volunteer leaders. A second follow-up with non-respondents was not attempted.

### Data Analysis

Responses from the qualitative section of the survey were coded according to key word identification. Key word responses were then

grouped categorically and evaluated utilizing descriptive statistics. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics and Chi-Square tests utilizing SAS 6.0 (SAS, 1991) to determine if there were differences between the two groups (current and former) of 4-H leaders. An alpha level of .05 was set a priori.

## **Results**

### Motivators for Initiating Volunteer Service

Volunteers identified similar motivations to begin their service of volunteerism to the 4-H program, regardless of whether they became "continuers" (those who volunteer for three years or more), or "non-continuers" (those who discontinued volunteer service within three years or less) (Table 1). The primary motive both groups identified was, "My children were 4-H members" which is consistent with findings of Zeutchel & Hansel (1989). This motive was followed by five affiliation motives, including: "I enjoyed 4-H as a youth", "4-H is a good organization", "4-H is good for the community", "I enjoy working with youth" and "Someone asked me to help."

From these similar motives two issues become apparent: 1) Parents become involved because of their children's involvement, and 2) 4-H has established itself as a credible, worthwhile, useful, beneficial organization which enjoys positive, influential name recognition and affiliation value. Almost no one began volunteering because they had extra time (although continuing volunteers perhaps have a different perception of time availability than do non-continuers), for self-improvement, because they hoped it would lead to employment or to make new friends.

### Motivators for Continuation of Volunteer Service

The motives which would have encouraged 4-H Leaders to continue volunteering are reported in Table 2. Findings of this study supported previous findings by Atkinson and Birch (1978), Henderson

Table 1. Motives Which Encouraged 4-H Leaders to Begin Volunteering

Motivators	Current (N=494)			Former (N=40)		
	n	Rank Mean	S D	n	Rank Mean	S D
Kids were 4-H members	339	1.82	1.24	24	1.83	1.24
Enjoyed 4-H as a Youth	253	2.80	1.42	20	2.40	1.39
4-H is a good Organization	416	2.76	1.19	34	2.85	1.21
Someone asked me to help	95	3.41	1.49	16	2.75	1.44
4-H is good for Community	361	2.96	1.24	27	3.15	1.46
Enjoy working with Youth	343	3.04	1.28	27	3.11	1.12
Liked sharing talents/interests	168	3.67	1.29	13	3.31	1.44
Wanted to help people	152	3.67	1.27	13	3.62	1.45
Sense of duty/obligation	116	3.69	1.29	09	4.00	1.00
Self-Improvement	34	4.06	1.30	03	4.00	1.00
Had extra time	18	3.89	1.02	07	4.43	0.79
Wanted to make new friends	40	4.38	1.03	01	4.00	0.00
Employment Opportunities	3	4.33	0.58	01	5.00	0.00
Other	27	3.33	1.69	01	1.00	0.00

Code for Mean Rankings: 1=Most Important, 5=Least Important

(1981) and Rouse and Clawson (1992) who observed that volunteers were motivated to serve by reasons which were issue/cause or affiliation based. The issue/cause identified by the majority of current leaders (61.12%) as the primary reason which prompted them to volunteer was a youth motive, although one could argue that the first six are all affiliation motives with youth or the 4-H organization. "My own children/grandchildren are involved," and "I enjoy working with youth" were the most common responses.

An affiliation motive with the 4-H Organization was the second most common motive and was reported by 20.84% of the respondents. These leaders remarked that "I enjoyed 4-H as a youth", "I am loyal/dedicated to the 4-H organization", "I enjoy 4-H" and "I want to give something back to the 4-H Program." The third most common motive identified by 4-H Leaders was a feeling of being needed. "I feel needed by my 4-H members," "Without my involvement/service, my 4-H club would disband", "I provide needed information and service" and "I

was asked / the Leader needs me" were frequent responses.

#### Motivators for Discontinuation of Volunteer Service

Former volunteers (who discontinued serving the 4-H Program after three years or less) terminated their service for two primary reasons. The reasons they gave for discontinuing are reported in Table 2. The motive listed most frequently (37.50%) was a perceived lack of support from other adults (parents of other 4-H members).

The leaders listed responses such as "No one will help me" and "No one cares." The second most common motive was a lack of time on the part of the volunteer to devote to 4-H meetings and activities (18.75%). These former leaders remarks included "I need more time" and "I don't have enough time to do everything."

Table 2. Motives Which (Would Have) Encouraged 4-H Leaders to Continue Volunteering Motives

Motives	n	%
<u>Current</u> (N=494)		
Youth	261	61.12
4-H Organization	89	20.84
Feeling Needed	45	10.54
Community Service	13	3.04
Feeling Appreciated	10	2.34
Extra Time	6	1.41
Nothing	3	0.70
<u>Former</u> (N=40)		
More Adult & Parental Support	12	37.50
More Available Time	6	18.75
If My Children Had Stayed in 4-H	3	9.38
If Club Members Were More Involved	3	9.38
Needed Child Care	3	9.38
Work/Scheduling Conflicts	2	6.25
Nothing	2	6.25
Compensation	1	3.13

Chi-Square = 394.24, df = 12, Probability = 0.0001

Negative Motivators/Deterrents Contributing to Discontinuation of Volunteer Service

The two factors most frequently reported by current leaders which would cause them to resign their position were similar to those factors which motivated former leaders to terminate their service of volunteerism (Table 3). A lack of assistance (in the form of an assistant leader or volunteer assistance from 4-H members' parents) which most volunteers associated with feelings of being unwanted or unneeded was the response cited most frequently by both current and former leaders (34.35% and 30.56%). Similarly, time/employment conflicts (24.30% and 25.00%) was the second most important category.

Former leaders were twice as likely as current leaders to leave the volunteer pool when their own children left the 4-H program (19.44% vs. 10.28%). Additionally, more former leaders cited "conflicts"

than did current leaders (13.89% vs. 10.05%) as a deterrent to volunteering. Finally, many 4-H volunteers (10.51%) stated that poor health, old age or death would cause them to resign their 4-H volunteer position, while none of the former volunteers predicted that level of commitment.

Similarity of Positive and Negative Motivators for Current and Former 4-H Volunteer Leaders

Both current and former 4-H Leaders identified similar continuation motivates (Table 1). Factors which led to volunteer leader resignation were found to be similar for both current and former leaders (Table 3), with lack of adult assistance, lack of time/job conflicts and children leaving 4-H being the primary negative motivators. However, former leaders were nearly twice as likely to resign their volunteer position when their children left the 4-H program. Additionally, former leaders identified "conflicts" as a greater barrier to continuation of

Table 3. Negative Motivations Leading to Volunteer Leader Resignation

Negative Motivator	Current (N=494)	Former (N=40)	Total
No Assistance, Unwanted	34.35	30.56	34.05
Time/Job Conflicts	24.30	25.00	24.35
Kids Leave 4-H	10.28	19.44	10.99
Conflicts	10.05	13.89	10.34
Health, Age, Death	10.51	0.00	9.70
Other	4.21	11.11	4.74
Nothing	3.27	0.00	3.02
Lack State Support	3.04	0.00	2.80
Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Chi-Square = 12.55, df= 12, Probability = .08

service than did current leaders. Finally, 10.5 1% of current leaders identified the category “health, age or death” as the factor which would cause them to discontinue their service of volunteerism to the 4-H program; whereas none of the former leaders envisioned themselves participating in 4-H volunteer activities for that length of time.

### Conclusions

All volunteers identified similar motives for initiating 4-H volunteering. These included their own children’s involvement in the 4-H Program, their own positive experiences as a 4-H member and their belief that 4-H was a good organization which also benefitted the community. Current volunteers were found to be primarily motivated to continue serving as 4-H Leaders by similar factors which they identified had prompted their volunteerism initially. The motive identified by all 4-H volunteers was “youth” (61.12%).

The second most frequently reported motive was an affiliation with the 4-H Program (20.84%). The third factor that they were motivated to serve because they felt needed (10.54%). Former volunteers identified completely different motives for continuing volunteer service. These included “more adult and parental support” (37.50%), “more available time” (18.75%) and the categories “If my

children had stayed in 4-H”, “If my club members had been more involved” and “If I would have had child care” (all at 9.38%).

Negative motivations leading to volunteer resignation include a lack of adult assistance, coupled with feelings of being unwanted and unappreciated; a lack of time or an occupational change; and the volunteer’s own children leaving the 4-H program. Current and former 4-H volunteer leaders identified nearly identical factors leading to volunteer resignation, except that former leaders were nearly twice as likely to resign when their own children left the 4-H Program.

### Recommendations

1. All volunteers initiated their service to 4-H as an adult leader with similar motives; their own children being 4-H members, their own positive experiences with the 4-H program and their belief that 4-H is a worthwhile organization. Therefore, Extension Educators should recruit potential volunteers from an adult pool consisting of 4-H member’s parents who are 4-H alumni. While the pool of volunteer leaders resulting from this recruitment strategy is likely to be retained longer, it should be pointed out that this strategy is not likely to assist the Extension

Educator in diversifying the volunteer base, as our current alumni pool is largely Caucasian.

2. To promote volunteer retention and continuation of service, Extension Educators should appeal to the three primary motivations which include youth (issue/cause), the 4-H Program (affiliation) or personal feelings of being needed.
3. Extension Educators should help prevent volunteer drop-out and discontinuation of service by securing an Assistant Volunteer Leader, co-leader, or encouraging parents or other adults to assist the volunteer leader in conducting club meetings, activities, or chaperoning events.
4. Flexible scheduling of volunteer meetings, activities, training opportunities and Extension office hours should assist those volunteers re-entering the workforce or changing job shifts to remain involved in 4-H activities.
5. Programs which promote 4-H member retention should likely have the dual advantage of also promoting adult volunteer leader retention, as many volunteers terminate their service of volunteerism when their own children leave the 4-H Program.

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