

IMPACT

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4-H Teen Conference building community engagement and youth leadership

AT A GLANCE

The Idaho 4-H Teen Conference model can be used to engage young adults in leadership and community programs that will enhance Idaho's connectivity, strength and future.

The Situation

Youth engagement is paramount to successful youth, communities and programs. Engaged youth help young people gain skills, knowledge and self-esteem as well as helps adults enhance their competencies and find renewed energy. Through youth engagement organizations, programs improve and communities improve quality of life (ACT Youth Center for Excellence, 2014). Idaho state 4-H Youth Development and the state Teen Conference Planning Committee needed to bring new energy and participation to the teen leadership development summer event, Teen Conference.

Our Response

The 2014 Teen Conference Planning Team, recognized the value of youth and adult partnerships in helping foster youth engagement, changed its approach in planning the conference. Special focus was placed on increasing the quality and quantity of program content.

The 2014 Conference activities were specifically designed to increase participant skills in community engagement and youth leadership through the following activities: community service projects, leadership classes, collegiate exploratory classes, a community career fair and, community business tours.

Research shows that youth must be fully engaged and involved in change efforts at the community



Teen Conference participants working with Landscape Architecture professor during college exploratory tracks.

level if they are to learn to function as effective members of society (Nitzberg, 2005). Another study analyzed perceptions of 4-H experiences, to identify the skills that had the greatest impact on 4-H alumni. Those experiences included conducting meetings, developing leadership skills and participating in community activities. Leadership skills and community service are two of the core values of the 4-H program and demonstrate how 4-H is successfully building those skills in youth, as well as having a lasting impact in adults (Flynn, 2010). 4-H Teen Conference is a model program providing youth within and outside of 4-H in Idaho, an opportunity to build their leadership capacity and empower youth to have a voice within their community.

The planning team included three Extension Educators, staff from the University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development Office, volunteers and the Idaho 4-H State Officer Team. This team is comprised of

13 youth from around the state. This team meets throughout the year and functions as a youth adult partnership to plan the annual conference. Meetings are run under the direction of the Idaho 4-H State Officer Team with youth and adults contributing to the agenda and discussion equally.

Program Outcomes

A survey (Survey Monkey) was developed and distributed to all youth participants following the event. Forty-three participants completed this online survey. Respondents were asked a series of questions including basic demographic information, participant recruitment, community engagement and leadership skill development.

When participants were asked to respond to the statement “I can work successfully with adults,” the pre-test question response was 58.14%, however the post-test question response increased to 83.72%. There was also a notable increase in participants perception of increased confidence, with 86% of responses indicating an increase in this area. Additionally 84% of respondents reported that they developed leadership skills by attending this conference.

In the area of community engagement participants reported that before attending Teen Conference, 42% felt they could make a difference in their community; 70% indicated they could make a difference after the conference. When asked, “I plan to work on projects to better my community” 28% reported that they had planned to do this before attending the conference and 60% after attending the conference. Participants were also asked if they “learned things that helped me make a difference in my community.” This response was 33% before participating in conference activities and increased to 67% after participating in activities.

According to the Institute of Applied Research in Youth Development, youth that develop leadership skills and a sense of community as young adults are four times more likely to contribute to their community and two times more likely to be civically active. The Idaho 4-H Teen Conference model can be used to engage young adults in leadership and community programs that will enhance Idaho’s connectivity, strength and future.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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