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Idaho's 4-H Volunteer Association targets greater statewide representation

AT A GLANCE

The number of participants was waning on Idaho's 4-H Volunteer Association executive council, so the association implemented several strategies showing promise in recruiting from across the state.

The Situation

With well over 100 years as one of the premier youth-serving organizations in the country, 4-H is reliant on a corps of well-trained volunteers to act as mentors helping young people grow into responsible adults. To encourage this positive youth development, Idaho's 4-H Volunteer Association (IVA) exists as a means of supporting 4-H volunteers by sponsoring educational events, distributing funds as appropriate and acting in an advisory capacity to county and University of Idaho Extension personnel. This board's mission was being placed in jeopardy as statewide participation on the executive council was being lost. Additionally, the four active officers were tasked with significant duties without an adequate number of council members to guide their decisions and help shoulder the responsibilities.

Our Response

Under the guidance of IVA President Jeremy Hampton and the assistance of UI Extension 4-H Youth Development's State Volunteer Development Educator Donna Schwarting, the association began a two-fold approach to address the alarming lack of involvement on this governing board by the association's members.



IVA Executive Council members Debbie Buxton, Tawnya Tracy and Jeremy Hampton at Canyon County Awards Banquet.

Idaho's 4-H Volunteer Association's priority was to amend its current bylaws to address four areas of concern. The bylaws needed to accurately reflect the changes in the 4-H districts being used in Idaho, to adjust for the burgeoning population growth in some regions of the state, to consider the need to maintain historical knowledge among council members and to clearly articulate a defined purpose for the association.

President Hampton led a subcommittee of executive council members, University of Idaho Extension representatives and an outside expert in reviewing Idaho's 4-H Volunteer Association bylaws and preparing an amended document for consideration first by the executive council and eventually the statewide membership. In addition to the four district representatives,

three “at-large” seats were proposed, term limits defined and four clearly measurable purposes outlined.

On Dec. 5, 2018, the committee met in-person to finalize the revisions to the document in preparation for the February meeting of the executive council, where they discussed the amended bylaws and invited public comment. By early June of 2019, a letter of introduction, measurement tools for collecting votes, and the amended bylaws were ready to be presented for review and a vote by all association members in 4-H Online. The bylaws were adopted with the support of 89 percent of the total respondents.

The second phase of the plan involved intentionally and frequently connecting with Idaho’s approximately 5,000 certified volunteers using multiple communication methods. Three specific areas targeted were social media, a quarterly newsletter and personal visits of executive council members at volunteer events whenever possible.

Once a new Facebook page was established for Idaho’s 4-H Volunteer Association, president-elect and communications director for the IVA Tawnya Tracy used expertise gained from managing social media tools for a local business to analyze the metrics. She specifically watched the “reach” which measures the number of unique persons reached by a post.

“According to FB’s analytics, our first post on 9-12-19 showed an 82 post reach,” said Tracy. “Amazingly, the second post on that same day showed a post reach of 352 in a matter of minutes. The next day I posted again and received an 875 post reach!”

The IVA also began publishing a quarterly newsletter housed on 4-H Online to ensure, among other things, that all 4-H volunteers in Idaho were aware of various statewide events, training opportunities available to them and scholarships sponsored by the association for adults invited to chaperone STAC, ambassadors and KYG.

“With an organization as large as Idaho’s 4-H that serves such an expansive area,” said Hampton, “it can be difficult to attract people to a state-level board. We had to have both specific, measurable goals and clear value for the participants.”

Finally, executive council members actively sought opportunities to travel throughout the state to attend 4-H volunteer events. So far members of the executive council have acted as trainers, keynote speakers, advisors and attendees at banquets, training days and statewide youth-centered gatherings.

Program Outcomes

The association saw initial movement toward reaching the goal of greater representation at the quarterly meeting on Oct. 25, 2019, which was hosted on Zoom. The 15 attendees were representing all four districts in the state, and half of the participants needed to request a link to connect to the meeting. The seven observers attending were a new addition to the digital conference, which historically has only seen active members of the executive council in attendance.

The Future

Members of Idaho’s 4-H Volunteer Association plan to continue their efforts to reach all association members throughout the state. Volunteers will be encouraged to attend the February meeting held in Boise over President’s Day weekend in which elections for the coming year take place. This quarterly IVA meeting partners with the annual Know Your Government conference held for 4-H youth statewide, which brings adult chaperones from around Idaho.

“I am encouraged by what we saw at our last meeting,” said Hampton, “and I am hopeful that we will come out of our February meeting with a full board for the first time in a decade.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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