

Southern district 4-H volunteer training provides practical skill development

AT A GLANCE

Southern district 4-H training provides volunteers with skill development to deliver positive youth development experiences to youth in their clubs and communities.

The Situation

The Idaho statewide 4-H volunteer forum, originally designed to provide personal development and networking opportunities for adult volunteers, was discontinued in 2017. The state forum attracted a small percentage of Idaho's 4-H volunteers and limited participation because of expense and time for the volunteers to attend. A new format was needed to engage a greater number of volunteers and offer content applicable to all volunteer roles. To involve more volunteers, the new format needed to be engaging and provide hands-on learning experiences.

Our Response

A team of southern district 4-H program educators and coordinators formed a planning committee to develop training for all volunteers in the district. The team determined that to meet the needs of volunteers, the format of the program should be a half-day and fast-paced. Based on a previous survey of volunteers, the team chose to focus learning sessions on positive youth development concepts, organizational skills and aspects of 4-H delivery methods. Project-specific learning sessions were not scheduled so that any session could apply to all 4-H volunteers.



Volunteer training participants attending a workshop to refine skills in leading 4-H projects emphasizing STEM.

The half-day program started with structured networking activities followed by two, one-hour workshop blocks. Each block consisted of three 15-minute sessions. During each session, five workshops were held concurrently (all five workshops were repeated three times). Volunteers selected three of the five workshops to attend during each block for a total of six 15-minute sessions. Additional networking time was provided during lunch with an opportunity to revisit with any of the workshop leaders. Workshops were led by either an Extension staff member or by an experienced 4-H volunteer. In addition, each attendee received a notebook of experiential learning activities they can use at 4-H club meetings or events.

Program Outcomes

The southern district 4-H volunteer training brought 62 adult and teen volunteers from five counties together for volunteer skill development. Program sessions focused on positive youth development, club management, project delivery and teen engagement.

In an exit survey, participants were asked how confident they felt about using the information taught from the workshops they attended on a scale of one=strongly disagree, two=disagree, three=agree and four=strongly agree. While all workshops received favorable responses, the top three workshops that volunteers gained the most confidence were:

- **You Can Make a Difference (3.50)**
Focused on making youth feel welcomed when they attend 4-H functions to help them feel like they belong, and they can engage in active participation and learning.
- **Care and Feeding of the 4-H Clover (3.45)**
Focused on how volunteers can use the 4-H name and emblem appropriately to avoid unknowingly abusing them.
- **Ditch the Stress with Organization (3.42)**
Focused on tips and tricks to help volunteers plan and organize their 4-H year.

Participants were asked what practices they are planning to implement in their 4-H clubs based on the sessions they attended. Comments included:

- Bettering our club meetings by making our members feel welcome.
- Work towards implementing STEM purposefully.
- Have youth run the meetings.

- Going to start parent/youth club contract and creating safe, inviting space.

Using the same response scale, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with the following statements (presented in the following table) about the district volunteer training.

Item	Average
Stimulated me to think	3.56
Motivated me to learn more	3.67
Motivated me to do something different	3.63
Motivated me to talk about this with other volunteers	3.65

The Future

Exit surveys revealed that each session should be longer, perhaps closer to 30 minutes each instead of 15 minutes. The top three requested topics for future training include: 1) How to work with difficult people, 2) Working with multi-levels in a project area and 3) Motivating youth.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

In addition to the authors, a team of 4-H professionals worked together to plan and deliver the southern district 4-h volunteer training. Special thanks to Nadine Cook, Tina Holmquist, Kara Jenkins, Chane' Nelson, Marilyn O'Leary, Joey Peutz, Donna Schwarting, Allen Taggart and Janelle Thompson. Many staff and volunteers generously contributed as workshop presenters as well.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Carrie Johnson, 4-H Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Canyon County • 208-459-6003 • carriej@uidaho.edu

Rebecca Mills, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Gem and Boise Counties • 208-365-6363 • rmills@uidaho.edu

Sendy Martinez, 4-H Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Ada and Canyon Counties • 208-287-5900 • smartinez@uidaho.edu

Nancy Shelstad, Regional 4-H Youth Development Educator • University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development • 208-364-4597 • shelstad@uidaho.edu

15-20-cjohnson-4-h-volunteer-training • 5/20