

2-1-2019

National Survey of Extension 4-H Professionals' Perceptions of Professional Development Factors

Joseph L. Donaldson
University of Tennessee

Lori Gallimore
University of Tennessee

Doug Swanson
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Recommended Citation

Donaldson, J. L., Gallimore, L., & Swanson, D. (2019). National Survey of Extension 4-H Professionals' Perceptions of Professional Development Factors. *Journal of Extension*, 57(1). Retrieved from <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol57/iss1/27>

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Extension* by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

National Survey of Extension 4-H Professionals' Perceptions of Professional Development Factors

Abstract

Our study describes factors that influence Extension 4-H professionals' likelihood of participating in a professional development experience. We used a work group–developed survey to measure the level of influence of nine factors. Through convenience sampling, we obtained 558 responses from 4-H professionals representing all regions of the country and multiple job roles. Cost, location, networking, personal needs, and time were strongly influential. Differences related to job role and years of job experience existed. Our major recommendation is that those creating professional development experiences for 4-H professionals consider both the major influential factors involved and factors of adult development, such as the need for self-directed learning.

Keywords: [professional development](#), [4-H professionals](#), [youth development](#)

Joseph L. Donaldson

Assistant Professor
Department of 4-H
Youth Development,
Agricultural
Leadership, Education
and Communications
The University of
Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee
joseph_donaldson@ncsu.edu
[@Joseph_GoPack](#)

Lori Gallimore

Extension Specialist
Department of 4-H
Youth Development,
Agricultural
Leadership, Education
and Communications
The University of
Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee
lbelew@tennessee.edu

Doug Swanson

National Program
Leader, Professional
Development for Staff
and Volunteers
4-H National
Headquarters
U.S. Department of
Agriculture, National
Institute of Food and
Agriculture
Washington, DC
dswanson@nifa.usda.gov

Introduction

Professional development for Extension agents/educators focuses their work on relevant issues (Seevers & Graham, 2012) and produces a substantial, positive return on investment (Harder, Hodges, & Zelaya, 2017). For youth development professionals, specifically, research has shown that professional development contributes to youth program quality (Garst, Baughman, & Franz, 2014) and retention of the professionals (Astroth & Lindstrom, 2008; Bouffard & Little, 2004; Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006).

Given the importance of professional development, a number of studies have addressed factors influencing the likelihood that Extension personnel will participate in professional development offerings. Broadly, these factors are associated with job relevance, logistics, and delivery.

Not surprisingly, Extension professionals consider relevance to their jobs when determining whether to participate in a professional development experience. In a survey of 157 Extension professionals from 14 states, Senyurekli,

Dworkin, and Dickinson (2006) found that content of a training was among the factors participants considered most important. Other studies have shown that county Extension agents/educators select professional development that is immediately applicable to community issues, their jobs, and programming (Conklin, Hook, Kelbaugh, & Nieto, 2002; Schmiesing, 2002) and that 4-H youth development professionals seek professional development content that aligns with their personal job-related interests rather than formal 4-H professional research, knowledge, and competencies criteria (Harder & Dooley, 2007). Also, the opportunity to network has been identified as an essential component of professional development for early-career 4-H youth development personnel (Varrella, Luckey, Baca, & Peters, 2016).

Besides level of relevance to their jobs, Extension professionals also consider logistical aspects of participation in professional development. According to Senyurekli et al. (2006), the Extension professionals they studied considered the factors of convenience and required time commitment (along with content) more important than opportunity to network, preapproval by a supervisor, and monetary cost. In a study of county Extension agents'/educators' perceptions of professional competencies, lack of time was identified as a major factor limiting study participants' professional development endeavors (Lakai, Jayaratne, Moore, & Kistler, 2012). An evaluation of the National 4-H Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship showed that lack of time was the most limiting factor related to practitioners' ability to interface with apprentices (Bailey & Deen, 2007). Extension personnel in Pennsylvania identified previous commitments as the top reason they did not attend Extension in-service opportunities (Mincemoyer & Kelsey, 1999), and participants in the study by Conklin et al. (2002) indicated the desire for professional development opportunities that are conveniently located and require minimal travel time.

Preferences regarding delivery methods exist as well. Senyurekli et al. (2006) found that 95.5% of their respondents were interested or very interested in online rather than face-to-face courses or workshops for professional development. In contrast, the study by Lakai et al. (2012) revealed that county Extension agents/educators deemed "face-to-face small group training workshops" as their preferred delivery method.

In sum, research has indicated that when selecting professional development experiences, Extension professionals may consider one or more of these factors: delivery method, immediate applicability, location, networking, personal interests, and time. Yet much of the research focused on factors influencing Extension professionals' engagement in professional development has neither specifically explored 4-H professionals nor examined differences based on the professionals' job roles or years of experience. Whereas county Extension agents/educators have been studied extensively with regard to this subject, research has not examined differences among program assistants, regional Extension agents/educators, state specialists, and state program leaders. Furthermore, the existing research does not provide a national perspective of 4-H professionals across job positions. A national perspective is needed to identify common components, if any, that could be addressed on a national scale by multistate groups of Extension professionals and/or 4-H National Headquarters. A strategically designed program of professional development—based on findings from studies such as the one we report here—may significantly affect professional growth, persistence, and program effectiveness.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study described here was to determine the influence of nine major factors, identified through our review of the literature and input from an expert panel, on the likelihood that Extension 4-H professionals will select professional development opportunities. The specific study questions were as follows:

1. To what extent, if at all, do 4-H professionals in various job roles report the major factors as influencing their professional development choices?
2. To what extent, if at all, do 4-H professionals with various years of job experience report the major factors as influencing their professional development choices?
3. What are the relationships, if any, between 4-H professionals' job roles and the major factors that influence their professional development choices?
4. What are the relationships, if any, between the 4-H professionals' years of job experience and the major factors that influence their professional development choices?

Methods

Our survey-based research project was a descriptive correlational study. It was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK IRB-16-02759-XM) prior to participant recruitment.

The National 4-H Professional Development Work Group, 10 Extension 4-H professionals including members of our author team, created and reviewed the survey. The survey addressed the following major influencing factors derived from the literature review: delivery method, immediate applicability, location, networking, personal needs, and time. Cost, job satisfaction, and job security also were included on the basis of feedback from members of the review panel who indicated that these factors should be studied for 4-H professionals.

Respondents rated the levels of influence of different factors on their participation in a professional development experience using the following four-part scale: 1 = *no influence*, 2 = *slight influence*, 3 = *strong influence*, and 4 = *very strong influence*. We also asked respondents about their preferences for different learning methods; however, only findings regarding the influence of the aforementioned major factors are reported here.

Demographic variables collected as categorical data were respondent's job role, number of years working as an Extension 4-H professional, and region of the country.

We used Qualtrics Research Suite (2009) software to construct and deploy our online survey and to collect the survey responses. A link to the online survey was shared with state program leaders for 4-H from all 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities, totaling 70, and members of the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA), totaling nearly 4,200. We asked state program leaders to distribute the link to all 4-H professionals in their respective land-grant systems. We selected this convenience sampling method to reach the highest number and most diverse composition of respondents across the various 4-H youth development job roles. Due to the use of a nonprobability sampling method, the results cannot be generalized and are limited to the respondents who participated in the study (Leman, 2010). As part of Qualtrics Research Suite functionality, a limitation was placed on the survey so that only one survey would be accepted from any one Internet Protocol address, thereby lessening the possibility that a single respondent would complete the survey twice.

The data set was downloaded from Qualtrics Research Suite into IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0. Descriptive statistics used were frequency and percentage. Not all respondents answered all questions. Responses from national program leaders were excluded from analysis due to the small number of such respondents. We calculated chi-square tests of independence to determine relationships, if any, between variables and used Cramér's V to measure the strength of any associations. Cramér's V is the appropriate measure of association when the

variables have three or more levels (Monaghan, Ott, Wilber, Gouldthorpe, & Racevskis, 2013). We described the magnitude of relationships using conventions by Davis (1971) and considered relationships significant at the .05 alpha level. For the purpose of measuring associations between variables, we combined categories as follows:

- The "no influence" and "slight influence" responses were combined, and the "strong influence" and "very strong influence" responses were combined.
- The years of job experience were grouped into early-career respondents (those with 1–10 years of work experience as an Extension 4-H professional), mid-career respondents (those with 11–20 years of experience), and late-career respondents (those with ≥ 21 years of experience).

Results

Of the 554 respondents who answered the question about job role, 119 (21.5%) were program assistants, 302 (54.5%) were county Extension agents/educators, 57 (10.3%) were regional Extension agents/educators, 60 (10.8%) were state specialists, 14 (2.5%) were state program leaders, and two (<1.0%) were national program leaders. Of the 558 respondents who answered the question about regional location, 216 (38.7%) were from the Southern Region, 176 (31.5%) the North Central Region, 88 (15.8%) the Northeast Region, and 78 (14.0%) the Western Region.

Influences on Professional Development Choices as Reported by Extension Professionals in Various Job Roles

Regarding those factors viewed as having very strong influence on professional development, cost was one of the top three considerations for professionals across the five job role categories. Program assistants, county Extension agents/educators, and regional Extension agents/educators also identified location and time. State specialists identified time and networking as additional influencing factors, and state program leaders identified location and personal needs as such. The percentages of responses for each factor from Extension professionals in various job roles are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Respondents' Perceptions of Influences on Their Likelihood of Participating in Professional Development Opportunities by Job Role

Factor ^a	No influence	Slight influence	Strong influence	Very strong influence
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Program assistants				
Cost (118)	1.7	13.6	35.6	49.2
Delivery method (118)	3.4	42.4	33.9	20.3
Immediate applicability (119)	2.5	40.3	39.5	17.6
Job satisfaction (119)	1.7	21.8	48.7	27.7
Job security (119)	4.2	39.5	35.3	21.0
Location (119)	0.8	5.0	45.4	48.7
Networking (119)	3.4	21.8	42.0	32.8

Personal needs (119)		13.4	55.5	31.1
Time (115)	0.9	12.2	53.0	33.9
County Extension agents/educators				
Cost (296)	2.7	16.6	40.9	39.9
Delivery method (300)	3.3	34.3	47.7	14.7
Immediate applicability (300)	4.0	29.7	48.3	18.0
Job satisfaction (301)	3.0	21.6	60.5	15.0
Job security (301)	10.0	32.9	40.9	16.3
Location (299)	1.3	13.7	42.8	42.1
Networking (301)	4.3	23.6	47.2	24.9
Personal needs (302)	0.7	15.6	51.0	32.8
Time (295)	3.1	14.9	43.1	39.0
Regional Extension agents/educators				
Cost (56)		12.5	50.0	37.5
Delivery method (57)	1.8	36.8	49.1	12.3
Immediate applicability (57)		36.8	45.6	17.5
Job satisfaction (57)	3.5	24.6	57.9	14.0
Job security (57)	12.3	52.6	29.8	5.3
Location (57)	5.3	14.0	49.1	31.6
Networking (57)	5.3	33.3	42.1	19.3
Personal needs (57)		14.0	57.9	28.1
Time (54)	7.4	9.3	44.4	38.9
State specialists				
Cost (60)		18.3	53.3	28.3
Delivery method (60)	3.3	35.0	50.0	11.7
Immediate applicability (59)	1.7	37.3	40.7	20.3
Job satisfaction (60)	3.3	40.0	50.0	6.7
Job security (60)	20.0	48.3	23.3	8.3
Location (59)	1.7	25.4	52.5	20.3
Networking (60)	3.3	20.0	46.7	30.0
Personal needs (59)		15.3	57.6	27.1
Time (59)		25.4	44.1	30.5
State program leaders				
Cost (14)		21.4	28.6	50.0
Delivery method (14)	7.1	28.6	35.7	28.6
Immediate applicability (14)		14.3	50.0	35.7
Job satisfaction (14)		35.7	35.7	28.6

Job security (14)	14.3	50.0	28.6	7.1
Location (14)		28.6	28.6	42.9
Networking (14)		35.7	42.9	21.4
Personal needs (14)		7.1	28.6	64.3
Time (14)		21.4	42.9	35.7

Note. Row percentages may not total 100.0 due to rounding.

aNumbers of responses are shown in parentheses.

Influences on Professional Development Choices as Reported by Extension Professionals Having Different Durations of Job Experience

Early-career respondents and mid-career respondents identified cost, location, and time as the factors having very strong influence on their likelihood of participating in professional development. Late-career respondents identified location, personal needs, and time as the factors having very strong influence on their participation in professional development. The highest percentages of both early-career respondents (42.0%) and mid-career respondents (42.3%) identified cost as having a very strong influence. However, the highest percentage of late-career respondents (48.2%) identified personal needs as such. The percentages of responses for each factor from Extension professionals having different levels of work experience are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Respondents' Perceptions of Influences on Their Likelihood of Participating in Professional Development Opportunities by Job Experience

Factor ^a	No influence	Slight influence	Strong influence	Very strong influence
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Early-career respondents				
Cost (314)	2.5	17.2	38.2	42.0
Delivery method (313)	2.9	43.1	37.7	16.3
Immediate applicability (315)	3.8	36.8	43.5	15.9
Job satisfaction (315)	1.6	22.9	55.9	19.7
Job security (315)	7.9	35.9	38.7	17.5
Location (315)	1.6	11.4	46.0	41.0
Networking (315)	3.5	24.4	47.9	24.1
Personal needs (316)	0.3	17.7	51.9	30.1
Time (308)	3.6	16.6	44.5	35.4
Mid-career respondents				
Cost (130)	0.8	15.4	41.5	42.3
Delivery method (133)	3.0	27.8	56.4	12.8
Immediate applicability (132)	1.5	32.6	49.2	16.7
Job satisfaction (133)	5.3	25.6	57.9	11.3

Feature	National Survey of Extension 4-H Professionals' Perceptions of Professional Development Factors				JOE 57(1)
Job security (133)	15.0	36.1	36.1	12.8	
Location (131)	0.8	12.2	49.6	37.4	
Networking (133)	5.3	21.8	42.9	30.1	
Personal needs (133)	0.8	14.3	60.9	24.1	
Time (128)	1.6	9.4	50.8	38.3	
Late-career respondents					
Cost (108)	0.9	13.0	53.7	32.4	
Delivery method (111)	4.5	27.0	52.3	16.2	
Immediate applicability (110)	1.8	24.5	45.5	28.2	
Job satisfaction (110)	2.7	28.2	52.7	16.4	
Job security (110)	10.9	50.0	29.1	10.0	
Location (110)	2.7	21.8	36.4	39.1	
Networking (110)	3.6	26.4	41.8	28.2	
Personal needs (110)		7.3	44.5	48.2	
Time (109)	0.9	17.4	43.1	38.5	

Note. Row percentages may not total 100.0 due to rounding.

^aNumbers of responses are shown in parentheses.

Relationships Between Job Roles and Influences on Professional Development Choices

We calculated chi-square tests of independence with Cramér's V correlations to determine relationships, if any, between job roles and factors influencing participation in professional development. See Table 3 for complete results.

No associations were found between job role and the following factors: cost, delivery method, immediate applicability, networking, personal needs, and time.

We did find job role to have low associations with job satisfaction, job security, and location:

- The majority of respondents reported that job satisfaction was a strong or very strong influence on their professional development selections. However, state specialists tended to be slightly less influenced by job satisfaction than respondents in the other job categories, $\chi^2 (8) = 9.805, p = .020$; Cramér's V = .135.
- Majorities of program assistants (56.3%) and county Extension agents/educators (57.1%) rated job security as a strong or very strong factor, whereas majorities of regional Extension agents/educators (64.9%) and state specialists (68.3%) rated job influence as having no influence or only slight influence. Thus, the association was that job security was a stronger influence for county professionals than regional and state professionals, $\chi^2 (8) = 20.524, p = .000$; Cramér's V = .195.
- Although the vast majority of respondents reported that location was a strong or very strong influence on their likelihood of participating in a professional development opportunity, state specialists tended to be slightly less

influenced by this factor, $\chi^2(8) = 15.540, p = .001$; Cramér's $V = .171$.

Table 3.

Respondents' Perceptions of Influences on Their Likelihood of Participating in Professional Development Opportunities by Job Role

Factor ^a	Job role				χ^2	<i>p</i>	Cramér's <i>V</i>
	Program assistant (%)	County Extension agent/ educator (%)	Regional Extension agent/ educator (%)	State specialist (%)			
Cost (530)					2.038	.564	.062
No/slight influence	15.3	19.3	12.5	18.3			
Strong/very strong influence	84.7	80.7	87.5	81.7			
Delivery method (535)					2.406	.493	.067
No/slight influence	45.8	37.7	38.6	38.3			
Strong/very strong influence	54.2	62.3	61.4	61.7			
Immediate applicability (535)					3.264	.353	.078
No/slight influence	42.9	33.7	36.8	39.0			
Strong/very strong influence	57.1	66.3	63.2	61.0			
Job satisfaction (537)					9.805	.020*	.135
No/slight influence	23.5	24.6	28.1	43.3			
Strong/very strong influence	76.5	75.4	71.9	56.7			
Job security (537)					20.524	.000***	.195
No/slight influence	43.7	42.9	64.9	68.3			
Strong/very strong influence	56.3	57.1	35.1	31.7			
Location (534)					15.540	.001	.171
No/slight influence	5.9	15.1	19.3	27.1			
Strong/very strong influence	94.1	84.9	80.7	72.9			
Networking (537)					4.289	.232	.089
No/slight influence	25.2	27.9	38.6	23.3			
Strong/very strong influence	74.8	72.1	61.4	76.7			
Personal needs (537)					.586	.900	.033
No/slight influence	13.4	16.2	14.0	15.3			
Strong/very strong influence	86.6	83.8	86.0	84.7			
Time (523)					4.198	.241	.090
No/slight influence	13.0	18.0	16.7	25.4			
Strong/very strong influence	87.0	82.0	83.3	74.6			

^aNumbers of responses are shown in parentheses.

Relationships Between Job Experience Durations and Influences on Professional Development Choices

We calculated chi-square tests of independence with Cramér's V correlations to determine relationships, if any, between years of job experience and factors influencing the likelihood of participation in professional development. See Table 4 for complete results.

No association was found between years of job experience and either cost or job satisfaction. The vast majorities of early-career respondents (80.3%), mid-career respondents (83.8%), and late-career respondents (86.1%) reported that cost was a strong or very strong influence on their professional development selections, $\chi^2(6) = 2.186$, $p = .335$; Cramér's $V = .063$. Similarly, majorities of early-career respondents (75.6%), mid-career respondents (69.2%), and late-career respondents (69.1%) reported that job satisfaction was a strong or very strong influence on their professional development selections, $\chi^2(6) = 2.835$, $p = .240$; Cramér's $V = .072$.

Years of job experience did have low associations with delivery method, immediate applicability, location, and personal needs:

- The majority of respondents reported that delivery method was a strong or very strong influence on their professional development selections. However, early-career respondents tended to be slightly less influenced by delivery method than those with more experience, $\chi^2(6) = 12.681$, $p = .002$; Cramér's $V = .151$.
- The majority of respondents reported being strongly or very strongly influenced by how applicable a professional development opportunity is to their existing programming efforts. The association was that as years of job experience increased, applicability was a stronger influence, $\chi^2(6) = 7.538$, $p = .023$; Cramér's $V = .116$.
- Although the vast majority of respondents reported that location was a strong or very strong influence on their professional development selections, late-career respondents tended to be slightly less influenced by location, $\chi^2(6) = 9.075$, $p = .011$; Cramér's $V = .128$.
- The vast majority of respondents reported being strongly or very strongly influenced to select professional development that met their personal needs, and years of job experience was slightly associated with this factor. The association was that as years of experience increased, personal needs was a stronger influence, $\chi^2(6) = 7.538$, $p = .023$; Cramér's $V = .116$.

We found a slight association between years of job experience and job security as a consideration for professional development. The association was that for professionals with fewer years of experience, job security decreased as an influencing factor for pursuing professional development opportunities, $\chi^2(6) = 9.897$, $p = .007$; Cramér's $V = .133$.

Table 4.

Respondents' Perceptions of Influences on Their Likelihood of Participating in Professional Development Opportunities by Years of Job Experience

Factor ^a	Years of job experience			X ²	p	Cramér's V
	Early-career respondent (%)	Mid-career respondent (%)	Late-career respondent (%)			
Cost (552)				2.186	.335	.063
No/slight influence	19.7	16.2	13.9			
Strong/very strong influence	80.3	83.8	86.1			
Delivery method (557)				12.681	.002	.151
No/slight influence	46	30.8	31.5			
Strong/very strong influence	54	69.2	68.5			
Immediate applicability (557)				7.538	.023	.116
No/slight influence	19.7	16.2	13.9			
Strong/very strong influence	80.3	83.8	86.1			
Job satisfaction (558)				2.835	.240	.072
No/slight influence	24.4	30.8	30.9			
Strong/very strong influence	75.6	69.2	69.1			
Job security (558)				9.879	.007	.133
No/slight influence	43.8	51.1	60.9			
Strong/very strong influence	56.2	48.9	39.1			
Location (556)				9.075	.011	.128
No/slight influence	13	13	24.5			
Strong/Very Strong Influence	87	87	75.5			
Networking (558)				0.270	.874	.022
No/slight influence	27.9	27.1	30			
Strong/very strong influence	72.1	72.9	70			
Personal needs (559)				7.338	.026	.115
No/slight influence	18	15	7.3			
Strong/very strong influence	82	85	92.7			
Time (545)				5.316	.070	.099
No/slight influence	20.1	10.9	18.3			
Strong/very strong influence	79.9	89.1	81.7			

^aNumbers of responses are shown in parentheses.

Limitations

Three limitations of our study must be considered when drawing conclusions and planning future investigations.

- The first limitation is our use of a convenience sampling method. The link to the online survey was sent to state 4-H program leaders who were asked to forward the link to 4-H professionals at their institutions. Members of NAE4-HA also were sent the link. A more powerful approach is needed whereby a population list is assembled to establish a sampling frame representative of the 4-H youth development profession. Moreover, NAE4-HA demographics may need to be compared to population demographics (once the list is assembled) to determine the representativeness of the NAE4-HA membership for national studies.
- A second limitation is our use of the vague term *cost* in the survey instrument. It was not clarified whether the cost of professional development was a monetary amount and if so whether this cost was to the organization, the department, and/or the individual professional. In their study of county Extension agents/educators regarding perceived barriers to and strategies for achieving professional competencies, Lakai et al. (2012) highlighted both personal monetary costs (e.g., "paying for childcare during the period away from home") and personal nonmonetary costs (e.g., "being away from family for a few days"). Both presented barriers for county Extension agents/educators in regard to pursuing professional development. Future research should address both monetary and nonmonetary costs.
- The third limitation is our use of the term *personal needs* to represent the influencing factor of meeting personal learning objectives and interests as opposed to professional learning objectives and interests. A better phrase may have been *personal interests* (Harder & Dooley, 2007), although more research is recommended in this area. Additionally, respondents were not asked to provide any context for their answers, such as the professional development required of them and/or the professional development, if any, they were seeking.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

To produce greater professional growth, persistence, and program effectiveness, those creating professional development experiences for 4-H professionals may consider: (a) the influences identified in our study, and (b) the differences expressed by professionals in various job roles and with various amounts of experience.

Cost, location, and time were major factors having very strong influence on the respondents' likelihood of participating in a professional development experience. Cost was identified as a very strong influence on professional development across all job roles. Location and time were viewed as having very strong influence on professional development for county and regional professionals. State specialists identified networking and time as influential, and state program leaders identified location and personal needs as having very strong influence. State specialists tended to be less influenced by job satisfaction, job security, and location than respondents in other job categories. The findings indicating that specialists were influenced differently regarding professional development underscores the idea that specialists' professional development needs must be continually assessed for effectiveness (Radhakrishna, 2001).

Additional research is needed to identify best practices for professional development relative to different job roles among 4-H youth development professionals. The different job roles may involve different expectations for professional development, and institutions may provide substantially different resources for use by employees in

the various job roles. Strategies for providing professional development that addresses these factors must be explored. As one example, perhaps professional development that results in college credit or certification would appeal to these professionals' need to maximize time.

Moreover, research beyond that reported here is needed to understand effective professional development options for 4-H youth development personnel at different career stages. In the study reported here, late-career professionals tended to be slightly less influenced by location but more likely to select professional development that was applicable to their existing programming and met their personal needs. Additionally, from early to late career, the importance of job security decreased as an influential factor on engaging in professional development. This finding is not surprising as late-career professionals likely have persevered through workplace challenges such as budget and personnel limitations. On the other hand, from early to late career, the importance of personal needs when choosing professional development increased. These differences among early-, mid-, and late-career Extension 4-H professionals indicate that professional development needs to be purposefully planned with adult and career development theories in mind. Drawing on 20 years of educational research, Webster-Wright (2009) posited that the term *professional development* is inconsistent with professionals who are "engaged, agentic individuals, capable of self-directed learning" and suggested use of the phrase "continuing professional learning" (p. 724). Extension organizations should highlight the self-directed nature of adult learning and provide more opportunities for self-directed learning as professionals mature in their careers.

Our study confirmed previous research regarding Extension professionals' perceptions of various professional development factors. Yet it also provided a national perspective on these factors for Extension 4-H youth development professionals with varied job roles and levels of experience. The most important point, however, is not whether Extension as an organization is providing professional development that is satisfying to Extension professionals. As previously stated, research has shown that professional development contributes to youth program quality (Garst et al., 2014). Therefore, the crux of the matter is ensuring the provision of professional development that contributes to greater program quality for young people and all those Extension serves. The need to provide effective 4-H programs for young people must drive professional development, and it is imperative that the factors discussed here be applied in both research and practice.

Author Note

Joseph Donaldson is now assistant professor and Extension specialist in the Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Acknowledgments

We wish to express deep appreciation to our colleagues who are in the National 4-H Professional Development Working Group: Pamela Ardern, Clemson University; Christy Bartley, Pennsylvania State University; Julie Chapin, Michigan State University; Rukeia Draw-Hood, Prairie View A&M University; Nancy Hegland, University of Minnesota; Warren Crawford, University of Wyoming; Carrie Stark, University of Nevada; and Sekai Turner, North Carolina A&T State University.

References

Astroth, K. A., & Lindstrom, J. (2008). Investing in professional development: Building and sustaining a viable 4-H youth workforce for the future. *Journal of Youth Development, 3*(2). Retrieved from <https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/view/303/289>

- Bailey, S. J., & Deen, M. K. (2007). 4-H youth development apprenticeship program: A pilot of a new certification in youth development. *Journal of Extension*, 45(6), Article 6FEA2. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2007december/a2.php>
- Bouffard, S., & Little, P. (2004). *Promoting quality through professional development. Issues and opportunities in out-of-school time evaluation*. (NCLS & Harvard Family Research Project Brief Series: ELO Research, Policy, and Practice No.8). Retrieved from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/promoting-quality-through-professional-development-a-framework-for-evaluation>
- Bowie, L., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2006). *The importance of professional development for youth workers* (Publication Number 2006-17). Washington, DC: The Atlantic Philanthropies. Retrieved from <https://cyfar.org/sites/default/files/Bowie%202006.pdf>
- Conklin, N. L., Hook, L. L., Kelbaugh, B. J., & Nieto, R. D. (2002). Examining a professional development system: A comprehensive needs assessment approach. *Journal of Extension*, 40(5), Article 5FEA1. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2002october/a1.php>
- Davis, J. A. (1971). *Elementary survey analysis*. Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Garst, B. A., Baughman, S., & Franz, N. (2014). Benchmarking professional development practices across youth-serving organizations: Implications for Extension. *Journal of Extension*, 52(5), Article 5FEA2. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2014october/a2.php>
- Harder, A., & Dooley, K. E. (2007). Perceptions of important competencies for early-career and established 4-H agents. *Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research*, 57(1), 43–52. Retrieved from <http://www.jsaer.org/pdf/vol57whole.pdf>
- Harder, A., Hodges, A., & Zelaya, P. (2017). What is professional development worth? Calculating the value of onboarding programs in Extension. *Journal of Extension*, 55(1), Article 1TOT3. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2017february/tt3.php>
- Lakai, D., Jayaratne, K. S. U., Moore, G. E., & Kistler, M. J. (2012). Barriers and effective educational strategies to develop Extension agents' professional competencies. *Journal of Extension*, 50(4), Article 4RIB1. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2012august/rb1.php>
- Leman, J. (2010). Quantitative data collection. In L. Dahlberg & C. McCaig (Eds.), *Practical research and evaluation: A start-to-finish guide for practitioners*. London, England: Sage.
- Mincemoyer, C. C., & Kelsey, T. W. (1999). Assessing in-service education: Identifying barriers to success. *Journal of Extension*, 37(2), Article 2FEA3. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/1999april/a3.php>
- Monaghan, P., Ott, E., Wilber, W., Gouldthorpe, J., & Racevskis (2013). Defining audience segments for Extension programming using reported water conservation practices. *Journal of Extension*, 51(6), Article 6FEA8. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2013december/a8.php>
- Qualtrics Research Suite [Computer program]. (2009). Provo, UT: Qualtrics Labs, Inc.
- Radhakrishna, R. B. (2001). Professional development needs of state specialists. *Journal of Extension*, 39(5), Article 5RIB4. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2001october/rb4.php>

Schmiesing, R. (2002). *Factors related to Ohio State University Extension agents perceptions of organizational justice and job satisfaction* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>

Seevers, B., & Graham, D. (2012). *Education through Cooperative Extension* (3rd ed.). Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Bookstore.

Senyurekli, A. R., Dworkin, J., & Dickinson, J. (2006). On-line professional development for Extension educators. *Journal of Extension*, 44(3), Article 3RIB1. Available at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2006june/rb1.php>

Varrella, G. F., Luckey, B. P., Baca, J. S., & Peters, C. (2016). Growing our own: A longitudinal evaluation of a professional development program for early-career 4-H professionals. *Journal of Extension*, 54(5), Article 5FEA2. Available at: <https://joe.org/joe/2016october/a2.php>

Webster-Wright, A. (2009). Reframing professional development through understanding authentic professional learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(2), 702–739. doi:10.3102/0034654308330970

Copyright © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, joe-ed@joe.org.

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)