Volunteer Management Needs Assessment of the Tennessee 4-H Program

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Recommended Citation

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Abstract: The purpose of the descriptive study reported here was to determine the perceptions of working with 4-H volunteer leaders and knowledge level of volunteer management through a state-wide needs assessment among Tennessee Extension agents with 4-H youth responsibility. The research determined a need for a formalized 4-H volunteer leader management system within the state Extension organization. Extension agents had high proficiencies in knowledge levels of managing 4-H volunteers and perceptions of working with 4-H volunteers. Results indicated that most Extension agents agreed on a need for readily available, Web-based materials and for a comprehensive 4-H volunteer leader management system.

Introduction

Volunteering has deep roots in American society. It has long been a part of the American tradition and, according to *Independent Sector*, over half of the American people will volunteer in some capacity during a year's time. It has been estimated 44% of adults, that is, over 83.9 million people, will volunteer within a year. This volunteerism is valued at over $239 billion per year (*Independent Sector*, 2009). These volunteers give their time to a variety of organizations. Volunteering involves groups from all ages, educational levels, backgrounds, and socioeconomic status.

Within the Cooperative Extension Service, volunteers are essential to the success of the 4-H program (Sinasky & Bruce, 2007). Dating back to 1952, Schulp thought the "network of county extension agent and local volunteer leaders" (p. 344) as the future of success in Extension programs (Schulp, 1952). Boone, Safrit, and Jones (2002) found that "volunteer involvement not only is critical to the successful implementation of the program…but may also serve as important adult learning for the volunteers themselves" (p.184). It has also been stated that one in every eight Americans has volunteered for the Cooperative Extension Service (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin 1997).

Volunteer management is vital to the success of the 4-H program, in which more than 410,000 volunteers

nationally (United States Department of Agriculture, 2009) and over 15,813 volunteers in Tennessee, (*Tennessee 4-H: A Timeless Tradition*, 2007) help to annually carry out 4-H youth development programs, project groups, and animals shows and serve as leaders at 4-H camp. According to state 4-H leaders and 4-H Extension agents, currently there is no formalized long-term support or management system for Tennessee 4-H Youth Development Extension agents and 4-H volunteer leaders to follow. The Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network (2004) states that the first step in planning a volunteer program is to conduct a need assessment of the communities in which the programs are delivered.

Purpose

The purpose of the descriptive study reported here was to conduct a state-wide needs assessment among Tennessee Extension agents with 4-H youth responsibility. The study was used to determine the perception agents had in working with 4-H volunteer leaders and their knowledge level of volunteer management. The study also determined the need for a formalized 4-H volunteer leader management system within the state Extension organization.

Methodology

The research reported here underwent a formal review and was approved by the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board (IRB) preceding data collection. The method used for collecting data was a four-part, researcher-designed, Web-based questionnaire. The questionnaire format was researcher-designed using Survey Monkey Web-based surveys.

Population

The population was a convenience sampling of 148 University of Tennessee (UT) Extension agents and 13 Tennessee State University (TSU) Extension agents with 4-H responsibility. The University of Tennessee had 167 individual Extension agents with 19 different full time equivalencies (FTE) of 4-H job responsibility. Nineteen of those agents were surveyed for the pilot study.

Instrumentation

A pilot study was conducted surveying 19 individuals from University of Tennessee Extension, one individual from each of the percentages of FTE that was not included in the study. The pilot study was conducted in August of 2009. Response rate for the individuals completing the pilot study was 68% (n=13). Results from the pilot study were tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient. Each objective was analyzed, and results were found to have a range between .728 and .819. Penfield (2002) stated that reliabilities greater than .90 are high. Those that are above .80 are moderate to high, and those greater than .70 are low. However, Penfield added that an alpha value of .60 is acceptable for social science studies. All coefficients were found to be adequate and satisfactory that the instrument was both reliable and competent.

The 148 remaining participants were emailed a survey in September of 2009. Dillman's tailored design method was followed for the study timeline protocol (Dillman, 2000). A total of 91 individuals voluntarily completed the survey, for a response rate of 61%. According to Babbie (2001) social science research has a wide range of acceptable response rates, and a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting with electronic self-administered surveys. An identical additional survey was conducted with Tennessee State University 4-H Extension agents after the completion of the University of Tennessee

Extension agent survey. There were 13 TSU agents with 4-H job responsibility. A total of seven participants voluntarily completed the survey, for a response rate of 53%. The data collected from both surveys were then combined, for a response rate of 98 participants from 161 targeted individuals, or a total survey response rate of 60%.

Analysis

The study questionnaire consisted of four parts. Sections I, II, and III of the survey collected information on knowledge, perception, and the need for volunteer management materials. These sections were assigned a range from one to five, (1-Strongly Agree, 2-Agree, 3-N/A or Neutral, 4-Disagree, 5-Strongly Disagree). Section IV was used to collect the demographic information of the population. Data analysis was conducted using the University of Tennessee Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 17.0 for Windows™ . Miller (1998) stated that descriptive statistics were the best method for statistical analysis for exploring or describing data. To further accomplish this, percentages, frequencies, and measures of central tendency were used to describe the respondents' feedback. Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were performed to signify any correlation between demographics and survey data and cross tabulation was used to further help explain the data findings.

Findings

Currently, Extension in Tennessee consists of 180 agents, both UT and TSU combined, that have a percentage of 4-H job responsibility. From the responses, the data concludes that 55% of these Extension agents are females and 45% are males. The agents range in age from 20 to over 55, with the greatest number of employees being in the age range between 25-35 years (37.8%). The majority of agents are White (95%), with 5% being Black or African American. Thirty-four percent of agents had Extension tenures less than 5 years or 10-19 years. The greatest number of Extension Agents completing this survey (51%, n=50) had 100% 4-H job responsibility. Over half of respondents said they had served UT or TSU Extension in a role other than 4-H Youth Development, and 6.1% had served as an Extension agent in another state. Over 40% of respondents had prior experience in employee management, and 36.7% of respondents said they belonged to an organized volunteer association. Less than 90% of respondents surveyed said they do volunteer for some type of organization.

Table 1 shows mean scores describing 4-H Youth Development professional's knowledge and perceptions of working with 4-H volunteer leaders. Also, mean scores used to identify the need for an expanded formalized 4-H volunteer leader management system. The percentages of Extension agents who agree or strongly agree to questionnaire components are also listed in Table 1.

Table 1.
Mean Scores and Percentages of Extension Professionals and Volunteer Management

	Mean (s.d.)	% of Agree or Strongly Agree
Knowledge of Volunteer Management		
Capable of writing job descriptions	2.21 (.840)	70.4
Supervision	1.72 (.513)	96.9
Motivation	2.08(.668)	81.6
Recognition	1.92(.821)	84.7

Identify needed change	2.17(.825)	75.5
Recruitment	2.59(.918)	54.1
Perceptions of Working with 4-H Volunteer Leaders		
Program Implementation	2.05(.694)	79.6
4-H Leaders are welcome within school system	3.00(1.098)	33.7
4-H Leaders can effectively meet after-school programs	2.00(.632)	88.8
Initiating New Programs	2.00(.795)	73.5
Contacting Key Leaders	2.50(.957)	50.0
Understand risk management	2.00(.966)	64.3
Removing Volunteers	2.00(.806)	69.4
Expanded 4-H Volunteer Leader Management System		
4-H Leaders need specialized training	2.01(.601)	85.7
Need for a 4-H Leader management handbook	2.04(.849)	66.3
4-H Agents need leader training	1.97(.779)	81.6
4-H Agents need readily available materials	1.83(.658)	89.8
Volunteer leaders need access to all materials	1.94(.784)	82.7
Need for comprehensive leader management system	2.28(.883)	66.3

Implications

Data findings included that more females strongly agreed (n=16) when compared to males (n=2) that volunteer leaders are capable of carrying out programs. Over 90%, (94%), of females responded that 4-H Agents need readily available management materials, compared to 84% of males. This indicates that a formalized 4-H volunteer management system that is both user-friendly and non-gender biased will be more effective in training both agents and volunteers.

Between age range and understanding risk management of 4-H volunteer leaders, cross tabulation showed that agents who are 25-35 years, the greatest number of agents in an age range, more likely disagreed in understanding risk management of volunteers. This signifies a need for more 4-H volunteer leader risk management information and training for Extension agents early within their careers or as included within a formalized volunteer management system.

Race and ethnicity had a positive correlation with the perception that 4-H volunteer leaders were welcome within the school system. It is understood that not every county in the state has school systems that allow 4-H volunteer leaders to conduct in-school clubs, and for this reason the results pertaining to this survey

component may be viewed as biased or skewed. Other correlations found to be significant between race/ethnicity were that of 4-H volunteer leaders perceived being capable of carrying out 4-H programs, 4-H volunteer leaders effectively meeting after-school project groups, 4-H volunteer leaders contacting key leaders within the community, the need for 4-H volunteer leader written job descriptions, 4-H volunteer leader orientation training, recognition of 4-H volunteer leaders, the need readily available materials, and 4-H volunteer leaders need access to management materials.

Extension agents with less tenure indicated a greater need for a comprehensive 4-H volunteer leader management system. These results indicate that a volunteer management system would be beneficial to all agents, especially those who are newer to the field. It was also found that a greater number of Extension agents with 10-19 years of experience either disagreed or strongly disagreed to 4-H volunteer leaders being welcome within the school system. Again, it is understood that not every county in the state has school systems that allow 4-H volunteer leaders to conduct in-school programs.

Significance was found between percentage of 4-H job responsibility and 4-H volunteer leaders needing recognition. Cross tabulation was calculated to further describe this correlation, and it was found that 90 agents (91%) either strongly agreed or agreed that 4-H volunteer leaders need a recognition program. All agents surveyed either agreed or were neutral regarding leader recognition.

Significance was found between region served and 4-H volunteer leaders needing an orientation program, 4-H agents needing a leader management handbook, and 4-H agents needing a comprehensive 4-H volunteer leader management system. Further study and exploration is needed to find if there are regional differences on how 4-H agents are trained with the use of 4-H volunteer leaders.

It was found that Extension agents with prior employee/volunteer management experience had less of a need for a 4-H volunteer leaders orientation program. The more experience in management an Extension agent had, the more knowledge they perceived that they possessed about motivating and recruiting 4-H volunteer leaders. Also, prior management experience led to Extension agents feeling more comfortable in removing a volunteer from a position.

Respondents who spent their time volunteering for an organization see both benefits and rewards of recognizing volunteer leader accomplishments. Cross tabulations further showed that agents who do not belong to a volunteer organization are more comfortable with 4-H volunteer leaders contacting key community leaders. It also must be noted that a small percentage (36.7%) of agents belonged to a volunteer organization.

Conclusions

These findings support a need for a formalized volunteer management system that would encompass readily available training materials for both 4-H volunteer leaders and agents within UT and TSU Extension. Agents perceive themselves to have high knowledge and perception levels in working with 4-H volunteer leaders, but have emphasized a need for readily available volunteer management materials, that are available to both agents and volunteers. Prior employee/volunteer management, age, and Extension tenure show increases in risk management understanding, motivation, and recruiting knowledge. A formalized volunteer management system should encompass ways and ideas to recruit and engage volunteers, keep volunteers motivated, and recognize them at all levels of participation. The system should also aid in evaluating volunteers and the programs in which they serve. It is recommended that an informational need assessment be conducted with 4-H volunteer leaders to better design a useful, user friendly volunteer management system.

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