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Volunteer Middle Managers: Human Resources That Extend Programmatic Outreach

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Abstract: Extension professionals must be able to give volunteers programmatic ownership,

resources, and the education needed to complete tasks. However, resources such as time and money are limited, especially in economic downturns, making it even more necessary to look at creative ways to bridge the gap between what programs and services can and should be delivered. Therefore, a middle manager program was developed as a tool to more effectively involve volunteer leaders and assist Extension professionals. Eight position descriptions and corresponding planning aids were developed, in addition to an agent strategy to aid Extension professionals in implementing the middle manager program.

Introduction

Volunteers have been essential to the success of the 4-H program since its inception (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). The great number and wide variety of programs available to youth in 4-H Youth Development programs are so vast that a single 4-H professional cannot possibly possess the entire range of knowledge and expertise that these programs require. The need for this knowledge and expertise creates a system that relies on volunteer involvement for effective program delivery.

The partnership and working relationship between Extension professionals and volunteers are necessary and often complex. Programs are strongest when the partnership between Extension professionals and volunteers is balanced and shared by both (Snider, 1985). Extension professionals must be able to give volunteers programmatic ownership and the resources and education that they need to complete their tasks. However, resources such as time and money are limited, especially in economic downturns, making it even more necessary to look at creative ways to bridge the gap between what programs and services *can* be delivered and what programs *should* be delivered.

Schwartz (1978) suggested the use of volunteer middle managers as a way to achieve the mission of Extension programs. She suggests involving key leaders, serving as middle managers, to accept specific program responsibilities. The middle managers, therefore, become the experts or educational resources for a small group of volunteers, much like the higher Extension hierarchy seen in many Extension programs. Schwartz emphasizes recruiting and selecting middle managers and compares working with middle managers to working with salaried staff.

For some Extension professionals, working with volunteers can be a daunting, difficult, or challenging task. Involving volunteers is difficult for the new Extension professional or anyone who has difficulty delegating tasks. Kemptom (1980) describes a good manager as an enabler of human resources. Kemptom believes the supervision process needs both a volunteer who receives responsibility and an Extension professional who must be willing to delegate responsibility to the volunteer. Schwartz suggests that the Extension professional delegate the task that he or she likes to do the best because this is the job that the Extension professional would be best at supervising because he or she feels the most comfortable with this area.

In response to this idea and to provide tools for working with middle managers for the new and experienced Extension professional, the members of the University of Kentucky Volunteer Administration Academy created eight volunteer position descriptions, corresponding planning , and an agent supervision strategy to aid in the development and implementation of a middle manager in

their county programs.

Position Descriptions

Seven of the positions were developed by assessing the current use of seven core curriculum areas found in the Kentucky 4-H Program. These curricula include: Animal Sciences, Communications, Family and Consumer Sciences, Health, Leadership, Natural Resources and Science, and Engineering & Technology. An eighth position was created for School Enrichment because of its prevalence and importance in the statewide program. Each of these middle manager positions was given the title of Coordinator. Position descriptions included the following components: position title, time required, location, general purpose, specific guidelines, qualifications, benefits, salary, and signatures of supervisor and volunteer (Culp, 2008). A complete collection of volunteer position descriptions is located in the GEMS Toolbox and is available at: <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4h/oldsite/VolPosDescription/index.htm>.

Planning Aids

To develop the middle manager program, it is important to have tools to help the volunteer coordinator and the Extension professional further develop the role and responsibilities of each. Volunteer Planning Aids (Culp, Bentley, Conway, Kelley, Mays &, Turley, 2009) were developed for the volunteer middle manager as well as an Agent Supervision Strategy for the Extension professional. The planning aids were developed from the ideas of previous classes of Volunteer Administration Academy members, are located in the GEMS Toolbox, and are available at: <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4h/oldsite/gems/engage.htm>.

Planning aids were developed with a monthly timeline and checklist for an entire program year. Planning aids for the Volunteer Middle Manager include the following items and topics:

- Stressing communication and planning between Extension professional and volunteer coordinator
- Recruiting new volunteer leaders
- Leader orientation
- Leader evaluation
- Program evaluation
- Monthly lesson materials and education
- Member recruitment
- Promotion of county, district and state activities, contests, events

- Communication of deadlines and registrations
- Help leaders schedule events, coordinating with other county, district and state events

Agent Supervision Strategy

The Agent Supervision Strategy is a planning aid designed to follow the 4-H Program Year (in this case, from September 1 to August 31.) Each month details the activities that are scheduled for the year in each of the core areas and school enrichment opportunities. Late August and September follow the GEMS model (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998) as the Extension professional must identify, recruit and orient new middle managers.

Each month begins with a meeting with the agent and the middle manager to organize lessons and materials needed by the volunteers in their core area. The important programs and activities at the county, district, and state levels are outlined as to when promotional and registration materials must be forwarded to the middle managers and volunteer leaders for up-coming events and activities. Time is often limited, informational tools are spread everywhere, and the Extension professionals are often times running from one event to the other. This strategy allows for one place to take a quick look as to what is coming up next, so that everyone is on the same page, and allows for the ability to check off accomplishments as they are made. The collection of agent supervision strategies is located in the GEMS Toolbox and is available at: <<http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4h/oldsite/gems/supervise.htm>>.

Conclusion

The implementation of a middle manager program allows the Extension professional to delegate responsibilities to qualified individuals so as to use human and financial resources in the best way possible. Through the implementation of middle managers (who serve as volunteer coordinators), stronger partnerships among volunteer leaders, volunteer middle managers, and Extension professionals can be made by allowing volunteer leaders to lead. Resources are increased to give the volunteers the tools they need to serve to the best of their ability. Middle managers have the ability to educate and spend valuable time in the program by dividing the program into core content areas and school enrichment activities. Volunteer middle managers enable the Extension professional to accomplish more than he or she thought possible, thereby saving time and human and financial resources. The result is a stronger 4-H program that will engage more youth in 4-H programs, projects and activities.

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