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## New Mexico 4-H Online Horse Bowl Tournament

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**Abstract.** Under COVID-19 public health order constraints, Extension professionals used readily available technology (e.g., Google Forms, Zoom, Facebook Live, and QuizBowl Pro) to conduct a traditional 4-H quiz bowl contest entirely in a virtual setting as an innovative means of offering positive youth development in a structured environment when most New Mexicans were homebound and unable to travel. Participation in the virtual contest was substantially greater than similar in-person contests in the preceding five-year period, and youth reported an increase in equine knowledge as well as life skill development.

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### INTRODUCTION

Quiz bowl contests are a fun and engaging way to challenge youth to increase life skills and knowledge across many 4-H project areas (Andersen & Karr-Lilienthal, 2011). In 2020, New Mexico implemented public health orders for the COVID-19 pandemic that moved public schools to online learning and prevented normal face-to-face interaction between youth at outside of school activities, such as sports and 4-H events. Since activities like these are more effective in positive youth development than other unstructured leisure activities (e.g., texting, social media, video games, etc.) that youth engage in (Ettetal & Agans, 2020), there was a need to provide 4-H youth with a structured setting to interact with peers and adults.

In this context, New Mexico Extension professionals collaborated to provide an engaging youth development activity by conducting a Horse Bowl Tournament (HBT) entirely online. The objectives were to: 1) provide a quality 4-H contest experience in a virtual environment, 2) increase equine knowledge of youth through study of the New Mexico 4-H Horse Project Manual, and 3) train Extension professionals and 4-H youth to use available technology to participate in virtual quiz bowl contests.

### METHODS

The planning committee consisted of the Extension Horse Specialist and 11 county agents. The group organized, advertised, took entries, orchestrated the online matches, and secured donated awards for the participants. The group developed rules for the HBT, which set play time to 45 minutes per match, and allowed teams to form across age groups (novice, junior, and senior). In case a county did not have a team of four, individuals were permitted to form teams across county lines. As part of the rule revision, segments describing software used for HBT play were included, and participants were informed of technology requirements (buzzer device, Zoom broadcast device, internet speed, etc.) needed for play.

While others have used robust learning management systems (Morefield & Fabregas Janeiro, 2021; Walls & Denniston, 2003) to conduct similar events, we chose to use software freely available to the public so that financial costs and user familiarity with the LMS were not a barrier to participation. The HBT employed Google Forms as an online portal where agents registered youth. Registered youth used Google Forms to submit their 10 questions, answers, and page references required in the entry process. Agents checked the compiled question database for

accuracy and sorted questions into 25 individual matches for the HBT. Two mock HBT matches provided contest officials a means to train to use the online buzzer response system, QuizBowl Pro, as both participants and as the system operator. Finally, the Zoom video conference platform provided planning meetings, mock matches, and the broadcast of the HBT for participants to hear questions, buzz in, and provide their answers. To ensure accuracy of scores, three people independently recorded individual and team scores for each match, and Microsoft Excel compiled and sorted these data to determine final placings.

Another 20 Extension professionals were recruited as the host committee to aid in organizing matches, score-keeping, and operating technology to conduct the HBT, which was held from 6 to 9 pm each weeknight over two weeks in February 2021. Each match required the following essential contest officials trained for the specific job described below.

- Contest moderator: read questions and determined acceptable answers.
- QuizBowl Pro buzzer operator/timekeeper: recognized contestants that “buzzed in” and kept official time for answering questions.
- Zoom Operator: ran the Zoom session, placed contestants into the competition room and contest officials into the conference room, etc.
- Zoom Monitor: monitored youth to discourage unseemly behavior or the use of external aids.
- Scorekeeper: each of the three scorekeepers independently kept individual and team scores, which were reconciled at the end of each match to insure the accuracy of contest results.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Of the 100 4-H youth registered, only 96 actually competed in the HBT. Participants and contest staff represented 23 of the 33 counties in New Mexico. This participation in the virtual HBT was substantially larger (616%) than the average number of youth participants (13.4) for the previous five year period for the State 4-H Horse Bowl Contest that is limited to senior age youth.

For program evaluation, 96 participants were asked to agree or disagree with four questions posed at the end of first round matches, and these responses (n=88) were gathered anonymously using the Zoom poll feature. In terms of increasing their knowledge of horses, 98% of respondents indicated an increase in knowledge. 90% of respondents reported they would participate in other virtual contests of this nature. For life-skills development, 92% of respondents reported using time management skills to prepare for and participate in the HBT, and 83% agreed that they learned new communication technology skills in order to play in the HBT.

A virtual awards ceremony held on Facebook Live on March 3, 2021, recognized the top 10 individuals in each age category and the top five teams overall, and it reached over 475 people. In this case, there was greater participation in the virtual HBT and awards ceremony compared to previous traditional face-to-face contests. Both qualitative comments from organizers and evaluation data were very favorable of the HBT; this is just one of many examples of how 4-H professionals adapted to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on youth (Arnold & Rennekamp, 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS

The New Mexico Online 4-H Horse Bowl Tournament engaged several youths to learn new skills and equine subject matter via a traditional 4-H contest held in a virtual environment when youth and others were homebound due to COVID-19 public health orders. This approach is readily adapted for quiz contests in other 4-H project areas. Furthermore, the HBT required Extension professionals to quickly learn novel technology, and implement it to meet program objectives, which had a positive impact on morale during the pandemic.

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