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## Value of Adult Volunteer Leaders in the New Mexico 4-H Program

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## Value of Adult Volunteer Leaders in the New Mexico 4-H Program

### Abstract

The study described here determined the economic value of volunteer time contributed to the New Mexico 4-H program. A volunteer profile of personal characteristics, role/activities engaged in, motivational factors, and monetary donations was established. Economic value was determined by calculating the average number of hours spent in 1 year by a volunteer and multiplying the number by the average hourly wage for nonagricultural workers (\$14.30) as determined by the Independent Sector in 1999. The article makes recommendations based on the study's findings.

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## Introduction

Imagine a world without volunteers. Imagine your 4-H program without volunteers. Who are volunteers in 4-H? What are some of the activities and programs they are involved with? What contributions do volunteers make? These are important questions to ask for Extension agents involved in volunteer management and development.

National trends indicate the number of volunteers in public and governmental agencies continues to increase each year (Independent Sector, 1999). The Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and the 4-H Youth Development Program are no exception. Volunteers are an integral part of the 4-H program. Nationally, in 1999, there were 534,295 volunteers donating their time and energy to work with 4-H youth. They served as volunteer leaders with local 4-H clubs/groups and assisted with 4-H youth development activities that reached over 6.5 million youth (National 4-H, 1999).

Despite an increase in the number of individual volunteers, a misconception sometimes exists that this multitude of volunteers represents cheap labor and are used to replace or decrease professional staff. However, in the reality of budget restrictions and reductions, volunteers are needed to not only maintain adequate levels of service to clientele but to also prevent the loss of professional staff.

A sound volunteer program is not inexpensive to operate. Therefore, the decisions regarding if and how volunteers are used in an organization should be based on the cost of the volunteer program compared to the quality of services provided as well as any advantages to the organization

(Brudney, 1990). Funding sources require government and nonprofit organizations to justify budget requests, and they also hold them accountable for the expenditure of public dollars and expect a return on their dollar.

Assessing the economic value of volunteer time to the organization is one approach to determining a rate of return. Learning about volunteers, such as their motivation, what activities they participate in, how much time they contribute, and the economic value of that time can help institutions increase efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of the study reported here was to determine the dollar value of volunteer time contributed to the New Mexico 4-H Youth Development Program. A profile of adult volunteer leaders in the New Mexico 4-H program was developed by describing personal characteristics, types of volunteer activities (or roles) engaged in, the estimated amount of time donated to these volunteer activities, monetary donations contributed, and motivational factors for volunteering.

A sample of 265 subjects was selected from New Mexico 4-H volunteers enrolled for at least 4 years as of May 1998 (N = 1,134). It was believed that volunteers who experienced a role or activity more than once were more likely to provide a credible estimate of time spent. Data were collected using a mailed questionnaire from February through June 1999.

The researcher-developed instrument was assessed for face and content validity by a panel of experts. Reliability was assessed using a test-retest procedure with 30 volunteer leaders not selected to participate in the study. The minimum percent agreement of 70% was set *a priori*. No statements, questions, or subcategories were changed or deleted. The final usable response rate was 74% (n = 187).

### **Findings**

#### **Profile of Volunteers**

Leaders participating in the study were found to have been serving the 4-H program for an average of 8 years. Most of the leaders identified themselves as project leaders who previously had or currently have children enrolled in 4-H. Fifty-eight percent had also been 4-H members themselves. Three-fourths of the volunteers were female, 90.6% were Caucasian, and 92.3% were married. Almost 73% were employed full time, mostly in the fields of accounting/office management, teaching/education, or self-employment. The age of leaders ranged from 31-55, with the greatest number in the 41-45 age group. Forty-one percent had attended a college or university, and 33% completed a college degree. Average family income was over \$50,000. Nearly half of the volunteers lived on a farm or ranch.

There is a vast population of potential volunteers that has not been reached that could benefit for possible aspects and contributions to the 4-H Youth Development Programs. Underutilized groups include males and minority populations, college age students and senior citizens, urban-based families, and people established in lower income brackets and educational levels.

#### **Motivation**

Primary motivations for volunteering with the New Mexico 4-H program were that their children were 4-H members, that 4-H was a good organization, and that they enjoyed working with youth. These findings are consistent with other studies investigating motivation of 4-H volunteers (Culp, 1997; Fritz, 2000; Rouse & Clawson, 1992; Steele, 1989). Fifty-eight percent of those studied were former members of 4-H.

#### **Activities/Roles**

Table 1 describes roles and activities participated in by total mean hours per activity. The majority of a leader's time was spent on countywide 4-H activities, teaching projects to youth, and local club meetings. The least amount of time was spent on recruiting 4-H members and receiving 4-H leader training. Volunteers are concentrating their time on teaching youth life skills through projects and club meetings. 4-H leaders were more active and more time was committed overall during the months of June through September. The minimum number of hours any one particular respondent spent during the year was 7.5 hours, and the maximum was over 2000 hours. The median number of hours was 369.5. Data represented a positively skewed distribution.

**Table 1.**  
Activities/Roles Participated in by New Mexico 4-H Volunteers

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Mean Hours</b>
Participating in county-wide 4-H activities	68.1

Teaching projects to 4-H youth	63.7
Participating in local 4-H club meetings/activities	63.7
Preparing for local 4-H club meetings/activities	49.8
Participating in state-wide activities	43.8
Coaching county, district and/or state contests	36.9
Serving on county-wide 4-H activities	27.8
Recruiting 4-H members (or leaders)	21.0
Serving on state-wide 4-H committees	18.5
Receiving 4-H leader orientation/training	13.1
Giving 4-H leader orientation/training	12.1
Other	5.9

### **Economic Value of Volunteer Time**

Using the 1999 average hourly wage for nonagricultural workers (\$14.30) provided by the Independent Sector (1999) and the median hours contributed, the economic value of the average New Mexico adult 4-H leaders' time was \$5283.65. Applying this figure, New Mexico volunteers (N = 1,134) contributed an estimated 6.5 million dollars to the New Mexico 4-H program in 1998.

### **Other Monetary Contributions**

4-H leaders in New Mexico made fewer than 25 phone calls per year and spent under \$50 on long distance/pay phone charges. They also spent less the \$50 of their own money on program supplies. New Mexico 4-H leaders, however, drove more than 500 miles in a year for related 4-H activities. New Mexico is a very rural state with only a few major urban centers, thus requiring greater driving distances and more time to attend both in- and out-of-county events. Nationally, in 1996, the average 4-H volunteer drove 300 to 400 miles and spent approximately \$50.00 of their own money (4-H Statistics, 1998).

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Given the study's findings, the 4-H program should be expanded by implementing recruitment strategies that target under-utilized populations, including male and minority populations, college students, senior citizens, urban based families, and individuals identified as lower economic status.
2. Volunteers are important resources to the 4-H program. They are used to teach, plan, and implement many programs. Extension should continue to emphasize leader involvement in the areas found to have had the most time served because research shows that volunteers are more motivated and effective in serving areas they have an investment in. However, 4-H faculty and staff should invest more time in promoting leader involvement, recruitment, and volunteer training if they wish to expand and increase the educational program relativity of these areas.
3. The economic value of the average New Mexico adult 4-H volunteer leader's time for the period of 1 year was determined to be \$5283.85. In 1998, 1,134 volunteers who had served at least 4 years were enrolled in the New Mexico 4-H program. Using these figures, New Mexico volunteers contributed an estimated \$6.5 million in time and talent to the state 4-H program

for 1998. 4-H administrators should use this information to demonstrate the significance and relevance volunteer have to the New Mexico 4-H program. These figures should also be used to address additional funding needs for the 4-H Youth Development Program.

4. 4-H leaders made less than 25 calls per year and spent under \$50 on long distance/pay phone charges and under \$50 on program supplies. Extension should continue to keep these "out of pocket" expenses to a minimum by allowing leaders to make long distance phone calls from their local office and through providing project materials at a low cost.
5. Leaders drove more than 500 miles in a year for related to 4-H programs. This is higher than the national average. A mileage reimbursement program should be initiated for volunteers driving their personal vehicles who drive 500 miles per year or more. The reimbursement program could be initiated through 4-H County Councils or fundraising events.
6. When recruiting volunteers, findings from this study should be used to help answer questions such as, "How much time would I be spending?" "What activities would I be expected to be involved with?" and "When would I be expected to serve?"
7. Volunteer leaders spent the least amount of time receiving or giving volunteer orientation and training. 4-H program faculty and staff should provide high-quality, frequent volunteer orientations and training throughout the year.
8. Other states should collect data to determine a profile of their volunteer 4-H leaders. Data collected can be used to make decisions about recruiting, orienting/training, management, and evaluation of the overall volunteer program.

The information collected from this study is useful to both state and county staff to help improve programs, recruit volunteers, and justify the spending of public dollars for 4-H Youth Development programming. Study findings can be used for program planning, recruitment, and accountability purposes. The program planning and recruitment aspects are primarily useful to Extension staff. For example, average hours spent by adult volunteer leaders in different program areas will be available to use in recruiting when potential volunteers ask, "How much time would I likely be spending?" Monthly patterns of activity for adult leaders will help to determine months when most leaders would be active and open to respond to surveys, attend training sessions, and receive information concerning new aspects of certain projects and to identify when recruitment of extra help might be needed.

Data related to the nature and extent of leader involvement can be used for accountability purposes (impact figures related to time spent by volunteer leaders in support of their leadership activities) and can be shared with funding agencies, donors, and sponsors, as well as provide recognition to volunteers serving in the program. Finally, general background data on volunteer leaders will enable a "volunteer leader profile" to be formulated containing characteristics of 4-H volunteer leaders to aid in recruitment efforts.

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