

RECRUITING LOW-INCOME VOLUNTEERS
FOR 4-H YOUTH PROGRAMS:
A MANUAL



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Prepared by:

Robert B. Lewis
Associate Professor
Agricultural Extension

Anne E. Camasso
Project Assistant
4-H Youth Program

Anne L. Heinsohn
Assistant Professor
Extension Education

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions to the project and this publication made by the following Pennsylvania Cooperative Extension Agents:

Elmore R. Hunter, Associate Extension Agent, Delaware County

Robert E. Leiby, Assistant Extension Agent, Lehigh County

Charles G. Replogle, Associate Extension Agent, Allegheny County

Janis Sokoloski, Assistant Extension Agent, Youth, Lackawanna County

Holly Ostlund, Assistant Extension Agent, Luzerne County

Christine A Tomascik, Assistant Extension Agent, Luzerne County

INTRODUCTION

Adult and teen leadership is a key ingredient in conducting a dynamic 4-H youth program. These volunteers have a variety of skills and experiences which permit 4-H to provide a wide variety of programs and activities for youth 8-19 years of age. Additional leaders are needed each year to give leadership in areas not presently served and to replace those individuals who have resigned.

The recruitment of volunteers -- the kind and number wanted -- is a challenge for the 4-H staff. Many times organizations needing volunteers issue general appeals to the population in the area. These appeals often result in a less-than-satisfactory response. It is often true that the only people who respond to these appeals are "traditional" volunteers who might have signed up anyway.

This manual is meant to offer suggestions for reaching those volunteers who are not considered traditional. Non-traditional volunteers make up a vast untapped group for recruitment. This group includes men and women who wish to become involved in a more direct service experience, handicapped, low-income, minority people, singles, students, young couples, teens, and the elderly.

The contents of this manual are an outgrowth of a special project conducted by the Pennsylvania State 4-H office to study the involvement of low-income people in 4-H youth programs. The primary focus of this project was the recruitment strategies used to bring these people into the volunteer ranks.

Information gathered from the volunteers, literature on volunteers and recruiting them, and from five Pennsylvania counties that participated in a second stage of this project will be presented.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

PROGRAMMING IN A NON-TRADITIONAL SETTING.

In the planning, conducting, and evaluating of programs for new or unreached audiences there are several common characteristics that seem to be true in various settings. Yes, each community and the people within that community have their own uniqueness. But, on the other hand, there are some things that they all have in common that are important to recognize when working in a non-traditional setting.

First, people are organized into a workable unit such as a 4-H club or group. The work that was completed through this project and the findings of others in the field confirm that people will volunteer for leadership roles if 1) they understand what it is they are to do; 2) they are not given a responsibility that is too great for their perceived ability and time constraints; and 3) they receive the support, training, and tender loving care that is needed for them to have a positive experience.

People from various backgrounds have an enormous number of unrecognized and untapped leadership and management skills. Adults, young and old alike, do care about the youth of their communities and want to see them receive the best learning experiences that can be provided. These adults also want to be given programs to improve their own situation. Many are quite receptive to helping others if they themselves can be helped through training and support sessions.

In addition to the people resource, some other community resources should be recognized. Each community has some organizations, such as schools, churches, agencies, and housing developments, that have facilities where programs can be conducted. Many facilities have equipment that can be useful in carrying out programs. These need to be identified and used.

At the same time the 4-H worker should follow some basic proven steps for being successful in a non-traditional setting. Included in these steps are:

- Being highly visible.
- Willing to work in the setting.
- Honest with people.
- Truthful to those involved in the program.
- Being there and staying around.

If we recognize that many people and organizational strengths are available in each community, blend that with the program planning, training ability of the staff, and resource material of the 4-H program, we can create a program with a much better attitude and thus increase our chances of having a successful program in a non-traditional setting.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

THE RECRUITING PROCESS.

In conducting a dynamic 4-H youth program, volunteers are an essential component in any setting. These individuals must be identified, recruited, and later prepared to do the leadership jobs that are critical for a successful program. It has not always been easy to recruit the needed volunteers, and with 4-H's expansion into non-traditional areas, this concern has become more apparent.

This study found, contrary to the opinions of some, that people will volunteer if a proven successful recruiting pattern is followed. That pattern includes having the right recruiter, understanding the potential volunteer, and using a well-planned recruiting strategy to involve people in the program. The following discussion describes the components of that success pattern.

LET'S LOOK AT

THE RECRUITER.

A major key in the success of any recruitment is the individual doing the recruiting. This is true whether the recruiter is a volunteer, a part-time employee, or a professional. The following are some of the characteristics that have been identified in a successful recruiter:

- Is comfortable in meeting and working with people they don't know.
- Is comfortable and accepted in a non-traditional setting such as the inner city or the isolated rural community. Has a strong desire to help people (youth and adults) in the community.
- Knows the particular community where the work will be conducted. Tends to know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Is familiar with the values, needs, and power structure of the community. Realizes that each community has its own unique characteristics.
- Avoids myths about the non-traditional audience. Believes that people will volunteer in any setting if they are convinced the program is good for their youth and community.

- Has a positive attitude about self, other people, and life in general. Tends to be optimistic and to believe the program can be accomplished.
- Believes in the 4-H youth program. Has had some positive experiences and feelings about 4-H. Recognizes the uniqueness and strength of the 4-H program.

The above characteristics are critical in the selection of a recruiter of volunteer leaders.

LET'S LOOK AT

VOLUNTEERS.

Volunteers are a necessary part of all 4-H programs; their importance in a program's continued growth and development should not be underestimated. People who volunteer come in all sizes and shapes and from all walks of life. Some of the earlier research on volunteer characteristics indicated that volunteers are likely to be:

- Middle class.
- White.
- Long-time resident in the community.
- Married.
- Homeowner.
- Female.
- In their middle years.
- Have children.

Some more recent literature on volunteer characteristics has indicated some differences in the people who are volunteering. These indicate:

- The backbone of volunteerism is still the middle class, but volunteers can be found in the working and lower classes; in fact, once you get these people to join, they are likely to be very active participants and attract others from similar backgrounds.
- Lower class blacks have a slightly higher participation rate than lower class whites.

The characteristics of the low-income volunteers who responded to the

Penn State survey are very similar to those features listed above. The sample had more blacks than whites, most were females, and the majority were married. Most were long-time residents of the community. The participation rate for these low-income volunteers was longer than usually anticipated by two to three years.

We have concluded that many more people are willing to volunteer than actually do so. If this is so, then it seems possible that 4-H could recruit almost anyone to do volunteer work of one kind or another if they followed some tested methods of recruiting and training.

Motivating People to Volunteer

Today, a large segment of our society enjoys the luxury of free time. Many of these people are highly educated and technically trained. One out of every 10 persons is of retirement age. Young people are no longer required to go to work at an early age, and if they want to work, not enough unskilled paid jobs are open to them. The trends of shorter working hours and limited job opportunities for the young appear to be continuing.

Motivating people to volunteer is an ever-present goal of all organizations using volunteers. Motives encompass a mixture of altruism (doing for others) and self-interest. Some common motivating forces include:

- I want to because it sounds fun and interesting.
- It's my duty to help.
- Something needs to be done.
- They want and need me.
- Unless I join in and help they can't be successful.
- This organization has to become more relevant and I want to help it change now.
- I want to explore this field to see if I'd like to work for pay here.

The idea of altruistic motives is also often expressed. Altruistic

feelings would include such things as:

- Reaching out to people in need.
- Helping others.
- Trying to solve, in some small measure, a problem of society.
- Doing something for a cause - ecology, education, etc.
- Serving as an advocate to advance the cause of others.

In a volunteer's own interest, either consciously or unconsciously, he/she may be hoping to:

- Learn and grow.
- Make new friends.
- Belong to a group, be part of a team.
- Develop new interests.
- Use particular skills.
- Test new career possibilities.
- Come to terms with his/her conscience.

All of these factors indicate that at any one time an individual's motives to volunteer will be a unique blend of reasons, rationalizations, and feelings. In order for recruiting programs to be successful, those responsible for recruiting must be aware of what the volunteer has to gain as well as to contribute.

In the survey conducted by Penn State, the volunteers were given a list of motivating factors, and asked to choose the factors which had the strongest effect on their becoming 4-H volunteers. The motivating characteristics they could choose from included:

- I like kids.
- I wanted a place to use some of my skills and knowledge.
- My child was in the group.
- Working with kids keeps me young.
- It was a change from housework.
- It was a change from my job.
- Other.

The overwhelming response was "I like kids" -- 409 out of a possible 590 respondents.

It has been suggested that this response is typical for traditional volunteers and has been through the years. These feelings are also shared by the non-traditional volunteer. In a sense, the two groups of people are really not all that different -- they all like kids and want to do something to help them. It is up to recruiters to help them realize their potential and match them with a group of youth with similar interests.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

RECRUITING STRATEGIES.

People become volunteers when they learn a group needs their time and talents. Recruiting strategies are the methods by which prospective volunteers learn they are needed. Some of the strategies require the recruiter to help the prospective volunteer learn that a group needs him/her. Others use media outlets, and still others require a knowledge of and rapport with existing community organizations, government bodies, and the like. Recruiting strategies can be used alone or in combination, often in sequence.

Five Pennsylvania counties used a variety of recruiting strategies, and their experiences are described in the following pages.

LET'S LOOK AT

ONE-TO-ONE RECRUITING.

It has been suggested that one-to-one recruiting or word of mouth by volunteers already on the job is the most effective method. The Penn State survey found this to be true. It is particularly effective with non-traditional leaders. It gives the prospective volunteer a feeling of importance -- someone thinks I have something to offer these kids and wants me to work with them.

The one-to-one method of recruitment was tested in four Pennsylvania counties, each with a different approach to see how successful they could be. The approaches they used included:

- A 4-H staff member doing the recruiting.
- A paid part-time recruiter.
- A volunteer recruiter.

Each of these techniques was successful to some extent.

4-H Staff Person Doing the Recruiting

In Lackawanna County (Scranton area) the 4-H agent went to three low-

income housing projects. In one project the manager was very enthusiastic about the idea of a 4-H club being started for the local youth, but not very encouraging about parental cooperation in the club leadership. She reluctantly gave the 4-H agent the names of several people who might be persuaded to help out.

At the Riverside Housing Development the first woman contacted knew about 4-H because her children had been 4-H'ers, but she was definitely not interested in getting involved at that time. A second woman also said no, until she saw samples of the Christmas crafts and was told she could keep the samples she made. She then agreed and recommended two of her friends to contact, telling the agent "They'll help if you tell them I am doing it, too." These three women conducted a Christmas Crafts project club and are looking forward to other things to do with the youth of their housing project.

Another woman on the agent's list was very glad to hear about 4-H wanting to start a project in her housing development. She, too, had children who had been in 4-H but was not too anxious to be involved herself. The idea of keeping the Christmas craft samples for herself changed her mind; she recommended some friends and told the 4-H agent to tell them she would help if they also agreed. This group got off to a slow start and ended up doing a project after the Christmas holidays.

In a third housing project the 4-H agent knew of a woman whose daughter had been in an Expanded Food and Nutrition club and therefore was aware of what 4-H was all about. She herself was unable to make a commitment, but suggested three older teens who might be interested. The teens were very enthusiastic and agreed to be trained and act as leaders. The Christmas Crafts Club was extremely successful and the teens performed their roles

capably. They are interested in continuing as 4-H volunteer leaders.

Paid Part-time Recruiters

Several counties hired a part-time person to recruit low-income volunteers. In each instance the persons hired were not necessarily low-income, but definitely worked to recruit low-income people.

In Lehigh County (Allentown area) the recruiter planned to work through the local high school Key Club (a Kiwanis-sponsored high school service club). These students, though not low-income themselves, were to be trained to 1) work as volunteers with 4-H youth clubs in a low-income housing project, and 2) because of the high turnover of Key Club members due to graduation, they were also to be trained to recruit parents from the housing project to assist and eventually take over the 4-H clubs located there.

A meeting between Key Club members and families from the target population was planned. This meeting proved to be an eye-opening experience for the 4-H personnel. At the last minute the Key Club members were unable to attend and since it would have been impossible to contact all the families involved, the recruiter and the 4-H agent decided to hold the meeting anyway to answer any questions about 4-H that the parents might have. The people who attended the meeting were so interested in 4-H and anxious for their children to be involved that several of them volunteered to be 4-H leaders. This very interesting turnaround might not have occurred if the Key Club members had been present.

Luzerne County (Wilkes-Barre area) used this approach, and was very successful. The recruiter's plan of action was two-fold: first, attempt to identify leaders through their children, and second, to be used only if the first was not successful, to approach people who were recommended

by community leaders. The recruiter contacted the principals of some local schools to gain their permission to do a 4-H program for the fifth and sixth grade students. Once the permission was given, she spoke with the teachers and students of these grades to increase their awareness of 4-H. During the program 4-H was explained to the youth by using "Something to Sing About" (a film), preparing a nutritious snack, and showing them project samples. At the end of the meeting a survey was passed out to all the children to be taken home to their parents. This survey, which was to be returned the next day, requested some general information about the parents and offered a phone number for them to call if they wanted more information about 4-H.

The response was almost unbelievable. Several parents contacted the 4-H office and in a matter of 12 weeks, 10 new 4-H clubs were formed. These clubs are not in housing projects, but in neighborhoods where people are either low-income or working poor.

Each of these clubs had from five to 22 youngsters and several had more than one adult leader. These clubs are not school 4-H clubs; the schools were used only as a medium through which to contact youth and their parents. It is hoped that one day they will evolve into community clubs.

Volunteer Recruiters

This concept was an outgrowth of using paid part-time recruiters. In Allegheny County (Pittsburgh area) six area residents were hired for a total of 506 hours to identify and recruit potential 4-H volunteers. These people were known in the community and recruited people they were acquainted with.

These recruiters became so interested in the 4-H program that four of the six offered to continue recruiting on a volunteer basis after their paid time was completed. Two of these four have remained very active and two

have developed health problems that limit what they are able to do. In addition to the two "key" volunteers, another person has volunteered to help in the recruiting process. These three people have assisted with, and provided leadership for, a community meeting attended by 25 interested people, visited two schools to arrange for 4-H programs, organized a "coffee" to discuss the responsibilities of 4-H leadership with five people who will help with newly formed clubs, participated in regional 4-H leadership training, and presented a program at a PTA meeting that attracted many interested parents. In all, these recruiters identified 55 persons who were interested in helping to develop 4-H in their communities.

It is important to maintain this personal touch in order for the new volunteers to feel that they are becoming part of an organization that is interesting and worthwhile. Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt (1975) have offered the following techniques and helpful suggestions in recruiting volunteers and maintaining their interest.

- Personally call the new volunteer and set a mutually convenient time and place for a future chat about 4-H. It may be best to offer to go to the volunteer's home rather than ask them to come to your office.
- Send a handwritten note inviting them to a meeting of all potential volunteers.
- Have someone who knows both 4-H and the prospective volunteer approach him or her for a one-to-one visit.
- When meeting with a group of potential volunteers give them the opportunity to sign up immediately. They would feel good about a group that really makes them feel wanted and has a place for them to use their talents.
- Have the 4-H youth do their own volunteer recruiting. Sometimes they do a better job recruiting their own leader. They know the type of person they want and can relate to best.
- Take advantage of every opportunity; that is, if someone you meet in the supermarket shows an interest, spend a few minutes talking with them and then offer to meet at another time and place to continue the discussion.

- Invite a potential volunteer to the Extension office to see how the county office works and what the professionals can do for them.
- Involve a potential volunteer in a club meeting without asking them to make a commitment. Once they see how a club works they may be more than willing to volunteer some of their time.
- Use a personal follow-up. After you have talked with a potential volunteer contact them again so they know you are still interested in them. This may mean a telephone call, a personal note, a home visit, or some other follow-up method that makes the person feel special. It is important to remember not to let the time between contacts become too long -- you may lose a good volunteer.
- Encourage volunteers to state their needs, interests, and expectations. Answer any questions they may have the best you can.
- Offer them some eye-catching literature on 4-H. This should be interesting, clearly written, and not overwhelming. They should be able to take these things home to read and think about their commitment.
- Offer the potential volunteer a choice of jobs. There are many different 4-H projects available and these, coupled with the volunteer's and youth's own interests, can lead to some interesting club meetings.

Each of these case studies offers a viable method for recruiting volunteers. The methods have been tried and proven successful in these counties and surely they can be used by others. The following points appeared throughout the case studies:

- Recruiter must have a positive, accepting attitude.
- Recruiter must be persistent.
- Recruiter must identify and provide tangible rewards for prospective volunteers.
- Recruiter should seek volunteers among participants in other Extension programs, such as EFNEP.
- Extension professionals must provide continuous support to recruiters and volunteers.

Each Extension professional may want to add an individual twist to a particular method to make it work with their clientele. The information from the case studies coupled with the suggestions from the Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt book, should prove successful for many counties in

their quest to involve non-traditional volunteers.

Using Existing Institutions and Schools

Sometimes the most convenient way to introduce a new program into a community is through already existing groups. These groups provide a ready-made audience and in some ways legitimize the new program. Some Pennsylvania counties made use of such existing institutions and agencies as schools and community organizations. Each organization offers several important and useful avenues through which to get new clubs started and recruit new volunteers from the target population.

In the city of Media in Delaware County, a community organization called the "Corner House" offers recreation, community action, and community services to the people of the area. 4-H is the only organized participating youth group. Sixty-five youngsters attend 4-H activities at the Center daily. One full-time 4-H aide works with the youth and occasionally some parents offer assistance.

The 4-H youth coordinator was faced with two problems in dealing with the Corner House. The first was getting more parents to volunteer their time and talents to the 4-H program since many were too accustomed to the Corner House acting as a free babysitter. They knew the kids would be cared for and they would not have to worry about them as they went about their own business. This attitude has been very difficult to change.

A second problem relates to the teens of the community. Unfortunately, they viewed 4-H as "kid stuff" and did not want to be involved. Money was being used as an incentive to change this attitude. During the summer teens were trained to work with youth through CETA. With this type of involvement, it is hoped more teens will take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them through 4-H.

Another club was started in an elementary school in a low-income community in Delaware County. This club was organized because the class was gathering information about youth organizations. They were very impressed with the 4-H presentation and decided to start a class 4-H club. Their interest led them to start a woodworking project with teachers, parents, and teachers' aides helping. A third club, in the process of being organized, was involved with N.A.A.C.P. staff members.

As can be seen, some of the 4-H clubs in Delaware County were led by people working with agencies or other institutions with the help of some low-income parents and other volunteers. One event helped attract parents of low-income 4-H'ers -- the 4-H Family Funday. Here parents had a chance to see 4-H in action and to see why their children were so enthusiastic about it. Some became so interested they volunteered to be leaders in the fall. There are plans to repeat the Funday each summer and it is hoped that more parents will take advantage of this opportunity to volunteer their time and talent. This day includes parents of youth from the Corner House, the school programs, and other organizations.

The urban youth agent in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh area) used his volunteer recruiters as a means to legitimize 4-H with borough councils and school principals. As a result of meeting with these groups the following occurred:

- Three borough councils adopted resolutions or motions supporting 4-H in their communities.
- Seven school principals voiced support of 4-H by providing time for 4-H Awareness Teams to present a program to the students and by incorporating 4-H programs into their schools.

The 4-H Awareness Team was made up of 4-H'ers who were interested in promoting the idea of 4-H. This team visited six schools and contacted more than 1,150 youth and their teachers. At these encounters each student was

given a "Dear Parent" letter to take home with them. Fifty-eight families responded to the letter indicating a desire to know more about 4-H.

All requests for meeting space, newspaper articles, and "moral" support have been granted by the community. It is this kind of support that helps community 4-H clubs take hold and grow.

Community Meetings and Neighborhood Blitzing

The Allegheny County urban 4-H agent again used his volunteer recruiters to help organize a campaign to blitz the target neighborhoods with 4-H. After interested parents had responded to the "Dear Parent" letter, informational meetings were scheduled at different locations in the target area to acquaint the 58 families who responded to the letter with 4-H and to match them, and any of their friends, with the 4-H projects that best suited their needs and interests.

This agent has also organized five methods of program delivery to involve new youth and adults in the low-income target area. These were:

- 4-H clubs or groups.
- 4-H day camp.
- 4-H resident camp.
- 4-H school enrichment programs.
- 4-H family groups (You - Too!).

Time is a necessary ingredient in recruiting 4-H leaders. The use of local recruiters made the recruiting through schools and community organizations an easier task and cut down on some of the time. These recruiters were known and trusted in their communities and this helped to open doors that might otherwise have remained closed.

Using Mass Media

We are surrounded by media -- everywhere we look we see advertising. Maybe we could advertise for volunteers! However, mass media techniques

enhance recruiting strategies, but are not in themselves a recruiting strategy.

In Pennsylvania, one of the counties that participated in the volunteer project provides an example. In Lehigh County (Allentown area), the Sunday paper runs a column in which organizations and agencies can advertise for volunteers. These advertisements were used in conjunction with fliers sent home to parents via school children. They were used to seek volunteers in addition to creating an awareness of and an interest in a 4-H summer camp program that was being organized. These methods proved unsuccessful.

Mass media can create an awareness of the 4-H youth program, such that subsequent volunteer recruitment is conducted among persons who have some knowledge of the program, thus increasing chances for success. In their book, Volunteers, Lauffer and Gorodezky suggest some uses of mass media:

- Insert advertisements in local, ethnic, and "underground" newspapers as appropriate. A local merchant might pay for the ad in return for a small thanks at the bottom. The possibility of advertising in organizational newsletters, taking advantage of "free" advertising that reaches large numbers of people, is also a consideration.
- Display fliers and posters in schools, stores, laundromats, and banks. Consider bulletin boards in much-frequented community spots. The thing to keep in mind when using this form of advertising is to think about the groups you are recruiting from and develop material aimed directly at them.
- Newsstories in the local press can also be a good source of free publicity. Most papers have "human interest" or "people" sections. Establish personal contact with the editor of this section and let him or her know what 4-H is doing that may be newsworthy. The role of volunteers in these newsworthy endeavors can also be pointed out here. Make sure each article has the name and telephone number of a person to contact for more information.
- Many newspapers also have "involvement" or "volunteer opportunity" columns. These usually have short paragraphs highlighting the types of volunteer tasks available and the name and phone number of someone to contact for further information.
- Letters written to the editor of local newspapers can be effective, especially when written by experienced local

volunteers or knowledgeable community citizens. These letters can also be used to give recognition to volunteers themselves, if written by 4-H staff members thanking a particular group for services rendered. This could provide incentives for already active volunteers and function as a recruitment strategy as well.

- Get spot announcements on radio, and commercial and public television. All broadcasting stations are required to air a specific number of public service announcements at regular intervals. Local stations prefer to use local spots. Consider producing a short video tape on some aspect of your 4-H program.
- Arrange speaking engagements for paid and volunteer staff and board members at educational and community based organizations. These might include churches, clubs, civic groups, and schools.

Remember, this type of PR need not be expensive. Take advantage of your local newspapers and radio and television stations. People in these businesses are usually very cooperative.

SUMMARY

In this study it has been shown that the non-traditional volunteer is really quite similar to the traditional. These volunteers will be attracted to 4-H youth programs if a systematic recruitment process is used. A number of basic principles important to recruitment have been identified and described and should be helpful to Extension personnel as they develop a recruitment process.