

Middle Management Volunteers Fill Needed Roles, Gain Skills, Satisfaction

By William E. Caldwell, Ph.D.



Volunteers constitute one of the largest groups of untapped resources in most organizations, and 4-H is no exception. 4-H is the largest youth organization in the United States, and as part of the Cooperative Extension System of land-grant universities, we reach into every county in the nation. We cannot possibly have a large enough salaried staff to give adequate individual attention to each of the 4.5 million members who participate in more than 100 different skill development areas. That's where the volunteer 4-H leaders contribute immensely.

4-H has been fostering a middle management concept using adult and teen volunteers to provide the personal attention members require. The 4-H definition of a middle management volunteer is one who fills the role between county or state Extension professionals and the local 4-H club leaders—a volunteer with formal training who is managing other adults or older youths to accomplish a specified task. Such a role takes some of the pressure off salaried staff; at the same time it gives a sense of accomplishment, responsibility and self-esteem to the volunteers.

Although we have seen some very positive results of middle management in 4-H, many salaried staff members are hesitant to delegate responsibilities to middle management volunteers. We can name counties where the Extension agent still

tends to do most of the work.

We need to address the question, "Why do we want volunteers?" A common answer is, "We do not have enough resources to do all the jobs, so we will have to utilize more volunteers." Supervision often is based on the philosophy, "I wish I had a paid helper, but I have to settle for you, Mr. Volunteer."

This type of reasoning is at the root of many problems in exciting volunteers to action and in working with them successfully. Recruitment based on this old idea is not positive or constructive, and it only serves to diminish effectiveness and the self concept of the volunteers.

The following are reasons for utilization of middle management volunteers in our programming:

1. Volunteers add credibility because they are unsalaried. This makes them a tremendous public relations asset.
2. Volunteers are objective policy makers. They provide us with a unique perspective of our work.
3. Volunteers offer constructive criticism and feedback that can assist in altering programs, events and activities.
4. Volunteers are private citizens. Private citizens are free to contact legislators, newspapers, TV stations, etc. They are powerful advocates. They can cut through



More than 4.5 million 4-H members participate in 100 different skill development areas.

Dr. William Caldwell is a professor and assistant director/4-H and youth development of the Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Nebraska.

bureaucratic red tape and other types of boundaries real or perceived.

5. Sometimes receiving assistance from a volunteer is viewed as more valuable to the recipient. To some people the feeling that volunteers are doing something because they are willing makes all the difference in the world.

6. Volunteers are independent of the organization, which means they function with less pressure. That can be an asset in accomplishing the task to be done.

7. Volunteers offer ideas and services that no one wants to fund for a variety of reasons. Throughout American history volunteers have been the pioneers in creating new services, often against the tide of traditional institutions. During the Revolutionary War we had an all-volunteer army whose dedication, historians say, made all the difference in the world.

8. Diversity . . . volunteers are different from salaried staff in terms of age, race, social background, educational level, income level, etc. This translates into opportunities for checks and balances to eliminate myopia.

9. Volunteers have skills different from those of staff. They are recruited to supplement the skills, talents and capabilities of the paid staff.

10. Volunteers have the option of focusing intently on a particular issue or client. They may do this in spite of the data or what is justifiable for paid staff.

11. Volunteers have immediate access to the community. A happy volunteer can recruit far more people than many staff. On the other side of this sword . . . an unhappy volunteer can create a lot of bad will.

4-H is a major continuing educational program for many people. Many volunteers do not attend community colleges or universities; they do not participate in courses leading to college degrees. In short, through middle management training we help them maximize opportunity to grow in educational leadership skills and management responsibility as they pursue a future with a strong personal sense of special purpose. We are in fact empowering 4-H leadership to dedicated men and women, both salaried and volunteers, who work for 4-H.

Many people I see in our volunteer programs have been unable to find a sense of self-worth or fulfillment in their paid career work, but are unable to change that work for many reasons. Through volunteer development, especially middle management training, we can help them find their self-worth and self-fulfillment.

Part of a 1985 grant of \$2.7 million from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan, to the National 4-H Council has advanced our knowledge about volunteer middle management. Through this part of the project, "Volunteers for the Future" seed money was awarded to 4-H staffs in Montana, Wisconsin, Virginia and the New England states to pilot middle management programs and compile training materials.

Results of the pilot projects were shared during an area conference in Greensboro, North Carolina in May 1987. These projects will be replicated in other states in 1988. When the project is completed in 1989, we will have a very complete set of documented results, training materials and procedures on middle management that will be applicable in most states. Some materials already are available from the pilot states.

Case Studies

Middle management was not new in Wisconsin 4-H, but it was not a strong concept. The goal of the Kellogg project in Wisconsin was to establish a 22-member team of 4-H volunteer leaders to advocate and promote the concept. Once the advocate team was identified, the leaders were trained to design seminars and presentations and to distribute educational materials to numerous audiences.

The team reached leaders' associations, leader executive boards, county Extension staff, administrators and county boards. The team's goal not only was to recruit people to fill middle management roles, but also to provide them opportunities to assume new and different responsibilities that may contribute to their own personal development.

"The other thing we observed was that the advocates also grew in the process [of participating in training and conducting seminars]," said E.J. Leuder, Kellogg project leader in Wisconsin. "Some of them said, 'I'm a different person as a result of the training and experience.'"

"One gentleman who has been working in supervision of a maintenance and health care system said that as a result of this training, he recognized talents beyond his current job. So, he's going to quit his job and go back to school at age 42 to finish his degree . . . The Kellogg project helped create some enthusiasm and momentum in the 4-H program during a year when budgets were tight and staffs were being cut and morale was low."

Virginia 4-H already had a diverse vol-

SAMPLE 4-H MIDDLE MANAGEMENT JOB DESCRIPTION: Key Leader for New Leader Orientation and Recruiting (Montana)

Purpose

To orient and assist new 4-H leaders to learn about their roles and responsibilities in the 4-H program. (To help new leaders prepare for being an organizational project leader in a 4-H club.)

Duties

- Acquire names of new leaders, addresses and phone numbers from county Extension office or recruiter leader.
- Contact organizational leaders of clubs with new leaders to go over new leader orientation plan.
- Contact new leaders to learn what their roles are, to introduce yourself and to explain your role.
- Record new leader questions, concerns and expectations.
- Conduct new leader orientation sessions.
- Stay in contact with new leaders.
- Arrange for specific needs of new leaders to be met.
- Report to agent monthly about new leader progress/activities.

Necessary Skills

- Ability to adapt leadership style to needs of new leaders
- Possess knowledge of 4-H club organization in the county and the ability to communicate that to other adults
- Ability to work with many types of people
- Organizational ability

Training

- Self study on teaching with people
- Attend training programs as offered
- Stay updated and current

Time Involved

xx hours per month for one year. Tenure of position is negotiable but a 3-year term is desirable. The third year will be a training year for a different key leader.

Extension Office Privileges

- Mailing—Discuss with agents about mailing materials to new leaders
- Phone
- Printing
- Computer time
- Other

unteer middle management system in place, so the goal of the Kellogg project in Virginia was to provide volunteers and salaried Extension personnel with management skill development opportunities on the local level. Twenty-three workshops have been conducted for existing volunteers to learn more about management. Position descriptions were designed for many middle manager roles.

"Our ultimate goals always have been the continual development of young people and the adults who have worked with them in the 4-H program," said Courtney Schwartz, Kellogg project leader in Virginia. "One great example was the master-gardening program where the agent handled horticultural projects. He literally was trying to relate to hundreds of master gardeners. That's impossible. Now he has developed a system whereby he has four or five middle managers that he deals with, and they in turn have a number of master gardeners to work with. Middle management puts folks in small groups so leaders actually hear what's happening and respond effectively."

Montana 4-H already had a strong volunteer system in place, but not an established middle management system. So area training teams were formed to select middle managers, create position descriptions, legitimize the program and train the middle managers in new roles. The teams were composed of Extension agents, area supervisors, volunteer leaders and state 4-H staff members.

"There is a great deal of expertise among the volunteers on a variety of topics which could be shared with other 4-H

leaders," said Betty McCoy, Kellogg project manager in Montana. "We need to capitalize on the expertise of the 4-H volunteers and other adults in the community who have skills, to help 4-H meet its potential."

"In addition to the capabilities of the volunteer staff, the paid staff in the state needs assistance to extend and expand the program to other audiences and provide new learning opportunities for people who currently are involved . . . both youth and adults. Since our paid staff is small, the most logical method to accomplish this is to look to the volunteers for help."

Approximately 40 of New England's 64 counties had implemented some type of middle management system utilizing volunteers, as a result of the 1982 National 4-H Staff Development Workshop on Middle Management at the National 4-H Center. However, each of the counties was using a different technique and strategy, and degrees of success varied.

The goal of the Kellogg project in New England was to review and analyze the numerous middle management strategies and models in the counties, and to select the most effective elements of each to develop a central curriculum. A steering committee, composed of a state 4-H staff member from each New England state and experienced 4-H middle management volunteers, surveyed the counties and conducted conferences to share information and compile the central document. The states involved were Rhode Island, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire.



IDENTIFYING, SUPPORTING AND GROWING WITH 4-H VOLUNTEERS IN COUNTY-LEVEL ROLES (WISCONSIN)

Telephone interviews were conducted with three individuals from each of 23 Wisconsin Counties. A 4-H county-level volunteer, a person who benefits from that volunteer and a county Extension 4-H staff member shared information about their current county program management role: what they do, how they do it, who benefits, barriers they encounter and support they need. Their insights are summarized below.

Who Are They?

Volunteers in county-level roles may also be referred to as middle managers or volunteer program managers. County-level volunteers plan and conduct events, set policy, recruit other volunteers, teach youth or adults, develop and evaluate 4-H curriculum, or promote the general program. They work in committees or as individuals, with an ongoing effort or a short-term event.

Volunteers who were interviewed had roles such as outpost camp director, judging team coach, project key leader, county ambassador advisor, dinner theater director, project committee member, summer youth tour host, leader recruiter, activity coordinator, interstate exchange coordinator, fair superintendent, county enrollment chairman, new club advisor, promotion coordinator, executive committee member, workshop instructor, organizational key leader.

Fair superintendents, project key leaders, and event coordinators are the predominant county-level volunteer roles. Of the 13,502 county-level volunteers in Wisconsin in 1985 their roles could be categorized as:

- 9,095 Volunteers in project key leader, activity key leader or program committee roles
- 1,683 Volunteers as one-time judges, speakers, or instructors
- 2,724 Volunteers assisting with short-term events

Who Benefits?

County 4-H program roles benefit the 4-H program, the community, and the volunteers themselves. The

greatest benefits noted by interview participants are that county-level volunteers:

- Promote teamwork
- Encourage participant ownership of program
- Support other volunteers and understand their needs
- Offer challenges, opportunities and role models for other volunteer leaders
- Understand youth and expand their learning opportunities
- Have a wealth of talent and experience to share
- Coordinate efforts with staff to strengthen programs when resources are limited
- Are a valuable communication link between leaders, members and staff
- Provide greater visibility for 4-H
- Improve overall quality of 4-H programs
- Enjoy their personal growth in 4-H

They Say It Best

Forty-five individuals who were interviewed responded to the question: "What would you recommend to other counties planning to involve volunteers in county-level roles?" These eight recommendations emerged consistently:

1. Begin with a small number of carefully identified volunteers and move slowly toward greater volunteer involvement in the county program.

—"Develop a game plan, then be flexible. Grow each year from there."
—"They need to be successful in that role; should be respected in the community; someone who works well with people and will be vocal about the program in order to promote it. Those initial people can build a strong base foundation on which to build the county-wide volunteer program management system."
—"Needs to be a self-starter, committed to the program, enjoys people and is enthusiastic."

2. Professional staff needs to allow volunteers to function to the full extent of their abilities in that role.

—"Allow volunteers to accept responsibility in programs that are even the agent's favorite, so the volunteers can develop the program to their needs—not the agent's needs."
—"They [volunteers] need to have both the authority and the responsibility."

3. Recognize communication between staff, volunteers and 4-H participants as a key element to volunteers working successfully in county program management.

Job descriptions, personal contact via phone or visit, workshops, newsletter, and informal discussion are important aspects of this communication.

—"Must have a very open relationship where they can call on one another, challenge one another, question one another, to keep a check and balance."

—"I call them regularly just to ask how things are going."

—"It's important to have something written down, so the volunteer can take it home to study."

—"Together develop a job description, . . . always using 'we' as a team effort to approach the tasks."

4. The staff role should focus on facilitating education, providing positive reinforcement, guidance, resource materials and challenges for growth.

—"Staff simply needs to provide the spark to ignite the potential that is already there . . . (and) watch that conditions remain good for the enthusiasm to continue burning."

—"Help them set their own implementation plan, identify what tools they need to accomplish this task, and what training they need."

—"Offer new challenges . . . to grow and to experience greater satisfactions."

5. County committees may reinforce the need, initiate the plan, provide support, and identify resources for volunteers in county-level program roles.

—"Enabling a committee to be in charge . . . keeps it a people-based program."

—"A [Co. Leaders Assoc.] should be involved in the development of a volunteer program management system in the county. That board may initiate committees in areas that need particular attention. Their support will accomplish the task."

6. Strengthen the 4-H program and maximize available resources by networking with subject matter experts, community organizations and other 4-H leaders.

—"A volunteer leader network enables all parts of the county to work together better."

—"Try to align 4-H programs with [subject matter experts] because these people have the background, experience, facilities and equipment. They are the ones we need to focus on. They are committed to getting others interested . . . committed to training others."

7. Don't hesitate to ask for program assistance from individuals in local communities, schools, agencies and organizations, because they are often willing, if their help is requested.

—"The only way to begin is to ask someone to help."

—"When adult participants see the work being done that they can benefit from, they often like to become involved and cooperate too."

8. Recognize that volunteers have valuable experience to use for developing ideas, formulating plans, teaching others and evaluating progress in county program management roles.

—"Past experience on the club level is recognized as valuable and respected among new club leaders."

—"Ideas should be planted, not forced upon volunteers. Experience is the best teacher—to be shared with other volunteers too."

What Needs To Be Done?

Five major concerns were identified that impact volunteer performance. They also identified resources, support and learning opportunities that could enhance effectiveness for volunteers in county-level programs.

1. County-level volunteers need the support of parents and other leaders.
2. Volunteer burnout may result from too little assistance.
3. Volunteers need additional skills and confidence for new county-level roles.
4. Volunteer roles or expectations are not clearly defined.
5. Volunteers need to be able to function to full extent of their abilities and desires.

Helpful Resources Identified:

- Teaching ideas and guides
- Video tapes for project learning and leader training
- A local resource center of human and material resources

—*Summarized by Marilyn Lesmeister, Project Assistant (Wisconsin)*