

Journal of Extension

Volume 58 | Number 6

Article 23

December 2020

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Recommended Citation

Torretta, A., Newman, M., & Kinsey, S. (2021). 4-H International Camp United Program and the 2025 4-H Strategic Vision. *Journal of Extension*, 58(6). Retrieved from <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol58/iss6/23>

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4-H International Camp United Program and the 2025 4-H Strategic Vision

Abstract

Building on existing relationships with international youth development colleagues, we created the 4-H International Camp United Program (4-HICUP) as a leadership opportunity for international and U.S. teens. In 2019, teenagers from Azerbaijan, Italy, Russia, and the United States came together to build personal cross-cultural relationships, further develop leadership skills, and increase understanding of their role as global citizens. The program was inspired by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture 2025 Strategic Vision for 4-H suggesting that "youth and adults learn, grow, and work together as catalysts for positive change." With the success of 4-HICUP, we want to include more states/countries and expand our outreach, and we encourage others to implement similar programming.

Keywords: [global education](#), [teen leadership](#), [international](#), [camp](#), [cross-cultural](#)

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Building on existing relationships with international youth development colleagues, we, as part of the 4-H International Camp United Program (4-HICUP) planning team, created a 4-day program designed to build greater cultural understanding among diverse populations of teens from around the globe. This camp provides international and U.S. teens opportunities to build personal cross-cultural relationships, develop their leadership skills, work with adults, and increase understanding of their role as global citizens. It is consistent with the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) 2025 Strategic Vision for 4-H suggesting that "youth and adults learn, grow, and work together as catalysts for positive change through 4-H Youth Development" (NIFA, 2017, p. 2).

Program Goals

On the basis of the premise that international education programs have long been shown to positively affect teens (Arnold, 2004; Boyd et al., 2001; Torretta, 2007), we organized 4-HICUP to impact individual youth participants and align with broader state and national programmatic goals.

Individual Participant Goals

Our goals for impacting individual youths were as follows:

- help youth participants understand their role in being global citizens;
- develop leadership skills in teens from different countries; and
- build personal relationships among a global network of teens.

Program-Level Goals

The program aligns with the following broad programmatic goals:

- build a sustainable and innovative global network that will empower youth and
- create sustainable positive youth development outreach in countries where there may not be a 4-H presence.

Program Structure

Following in-country selection processes, 36 teens, aged 16–19, and their 10 chaperones traveled from Azerbaijan, Italy, and Russia to join U.S. teens for this unique 14-day program. All participants spoke English. There was a registration fee to participate in the program, and participants paid their own airfare, traveling with their home country group to the United States. The program was sequenced to consist of four main components: 4 days of cultural and historic visits in Washington, DC; weekend homestays with New Jersey host families; 6 days of programming at the state 4-H Camp; and a 2-day visit to New York City.

Washington, DC

International participants flew into Washington, DC, and stayed at the National 4-H Center to begin their adventure in the United States. This component was scheduled to occur at the beginning of the program to facilitate intentional relationship building as participants took part in sightseeing and adjusted to the time change. In addition to sightseeing, the group toured the Holocaust Museum as a precursor to the One Clip at a Time program that would occur later in the program.

Homestays

Next, international participants traveled to New Jersey by bus where they spent an afternoon "down the shore" before meeting their host families. Twelve host families welcomed the youths and chaperones into their homes. Two to five participants were housed together to make them feel more comfortable during their homestays. Hosts and guests began the weekend as strangers but became friends after their few days together. International guests got to sample daily life in the United States just as New Jersey families were exposed to a new cultural experience. Host families were surveyed 1 month after the program: 100% reported having had positive experiences.

4-H Camp Programming

The core of HICUP was the week at the 4-H Camp, where teens participated in a variety of workshops to

challenge their perceptions of preconceived cultural stereotypes, explore global issues, develop a working foundation of leadership, and build personal relationships. On the first day of camp, the 4-H flag was raised, and each group hung their country's flag on the porch of the dining hall while singing their national anthem. Throughout the week, international youths shared stories, music, and dance representing their cultures and cooked traditional meals for everyone. Each evening one country was responsible for preparing dinner and sharing programming from their homeland, increasing appreciation for and understanding of the different cultures represented by participants.

The program content was inspired by NIFA's 2025 mission for 4-H, so the primary content areas of 4-H—civic engagement and leadership, healthy living, and science—were the focus. We conducted 26 hr of programming in nine topic areas. One Clip at a Time (<https://oneclipatatime.org/>) sessions each morning helped foster understanding and appreciation of diverse interests, cultures, and backgrounds. Building on the group's visit to the Holocaust Museum, these sessions introduced youths to the concepts of prejudice and tolerance. The goal was to empower youths to make positive changes that will have an impact on others.

Other camp sessions included Plastic Pollution and Solutions, 4-H 101, Mindfulness and Messages, Team Building, and Personality IQ as well as various adventure-based experiential activities based on Karl Rohnke's work in adventure education (Rohnke, 1984, 1989; Rohnke & Butler, 1995). The last evening, teens were organized in rows and were instructed to compliment one another, reflecting on their time together in the program. Teens shared their impressions, feelings, and memories of encounters during the program, thus strengthening the bonds among them. The impact of this one activity resounded with teens and manifested in tears and hugs. One Italian teen shared that he had been friends with another teen since they were toddlers and had never seen him cry until then. Twelve months after the camp experience, participants indicated that this activity was the most meaningful.

Results

Postprogram evaluations revealed that 79% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that after learning about the different countries during the evening programs, they were able to appreciate cultures different from their own. Furthermore, participants, using a 5-point scale with 5 being the highest level of agreement, shared that because of their involvement in the program they

- felt they could make a difference in their communities ($M = 4.70$),
- felt they understood the qualities needed to be a good leader ($M = 4.53$), and
- understood leadership ($M = 4.31$).

In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that via social media participants have remained connected.

Implications

We look to the future to include more states/countries and expand our outreach according to NIFA's strategic vision statement, and we encourage others to implement similar programming. In the meantime, because the COVID-19 pandemic is restricting travel, we continue to sustain international relationships through virtual short-term exploratory programs.

Author Note

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