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Perceived Strengths of the Georgia 4-H Program: A Delphi Analysis

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The Georgia 4-H program is the largest youth organization in the state and empowers youth participants to become autonomous and productive members of society. 4-H involvement has been linked to positive youth development outcomes, including leadership and vocational skills, increased self-confidence, and meaningful relationships. The focus of this study was to identify key strengths of the 4-H program, as indicated by Foundation Advisory Board members (some of whom were 4-H alumni), to guide future programming and curriculum efforts. Strengths were examined through an appreciative inquiry using organizational measures, including positive youth development as conceptualized by The Five C's Model (Lerner et al., 2000) and positive organizational behavior as conceptualized by the C.H.O.S.E. characteristics (Luthans, 2002). Through a modified Delphi approach, an expert panel (n =31) identified and reached consensus regarding perceived strengths of the Georgia 4-H program. Eighty-seven items were retained after the Delphi process and were analyzed using the constant comparative method (CCM). Of these 87 items, 41 received a unanimous individual consensus rating. Seven themes emerged following the CCM analysis, including 4-H Organization – General; 4-H Organization – Leadership and Support; Leadership and Professional Development; Character and Life Skills Development; Youth Development; Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion; and Programming and Opportunities.

Keywords: 4-H strengths, positive youth development, positive organizational behavior, appreciative inquiry

Introduction

The relationship between the process of actual experience and education is intimate and necessary (Dewey, 1938). The 4-H program has long been hailed as the premier youth organization of the United States and has become one of the most recognizable parts of the Cooperative Extension Service (Radhakrishna & Sinasky, 2005). From its inception, 4-H has utilized a system of clubs and competitive activities to promote learning and development through experiential learning (Boyd et al., 1992; Ladewig & Thomas, 1987). While 4-H was originally developed to teach agricultural skills to youth, the contemporary program focuses on

positive youth development by "providing experiences that increase the likelihood of enhanced wellbeing and optimal development" (Arnold, 2018, p.141). While a focus on developmental needs has been present in 4-H programming since the 1940s (Rosenberg, 2015), the program has shifted to an emphasis on positive youth development, following the advent of developmental science as a distinct discipline (Lerner et al., 2000).

Specifically, within Georgia, the state's 4-H program seeks to empower youth participants to learn, discover, and create so that they can become autonomous, productive, and essential members of society (University of Georgia Extension, n.d.). 4-H is the largest youth leadership organization in the state, reaching over 242,000 individuals annually (University of Georgia Extension, n.d.). Programming and curricula focus on three broad topics: 1) Agriculture and STEM, 2) Civic Engagement, and 3) Healthy Living (Georgia 4-H, n.d.).

The impact of 4-H involvement on positive youth development has been widely researched. 4-H involvement has been linked to positive development in leadership skills (Kelsey & Furhman, 2020; Moran et al., 2019; Radhakrishna & Doamekpor, 2009), enhanced self-confidence and perception (Anderson et al., 2010; Phelps & Kotrlik, 2007), increased sense of belonging, personal wellbeing, and empowerment (Christens, 2012; Weybright et al., 2016; Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2006), and meaningful relationships with peers, parents, and guardians (Garst et al., 2006; Moran et al., 2019; Radhakrishna & Doamekpor, 2009; Worker, 2014). Positive organizational behavior has been widely studied in adult leadership development, but as yet, has not been widely applied to youth leadership development, specifically within the 4-H program. This study seeks to fill a gap in the 4-H youth development literature by examining strengths of the 4-H program through a lens of positive organizational behaviors. While it is important to emphasize positive youth development outcomes, it is also important to recognize and emphasize the positive organizational behaviors, as determined by adult leaders within the organization, which will promote desired youth development and leadership development outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study is structured through an appreciative inquiry approach, which focuses on identifying the successes and strengths of an organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Lamm & Lamm, 2018). Additionally, we consider the strengths of the Georgia 4-H program through a positive youth development and positive organizational behavior lens.

Positive Youth Development

The Five C's Model of Positive Youth Development posits that positive development occurs if the strengths of youth are aligned systematically with beneficial, growth-promoting developmental assets (Benson et al., 1998). Lerner et al. (2000) conceptualized this model, categorizing goals of youth development into five themes: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Competence refers to an individual's positive view of their action in

relation to academic, social, vocational, cognitive, and health aspects (Lerner & Lerner, 2011; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Confidence denotes an individual's sense of internal self-worth and self-efficacy (Lerner & Lerner, 2011). Connection represents the positive bonds an individual forms with their microcosm – i.e., peers and family – as well as their macrocosm – i.e., school and community (Lerner & Lerner, 2011; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Character relates to an individual's sense of morality, integrity, and respect for cultural and societal norms (Lerner & Lerner, 2011). Lastly, caring, sometimes referred to as compassion, represents an individual's capacity for feeling sympathy and empathy towards others (Lerner & Lerner, 2011). Individuals who manifest these five characteristics were more likely to engage in behaviors that fostered mutually beneficial relations and enhanced contributions to self, community, and society (Bowers et al., 2010).

The Five C's Model should help inform the goals of youth development programs (Lerner et al., 2014). The key ecological assets found linked to positive and negative youth development can be broadly categorized into four domains: other individuals (e.g., peers, mentors, parents, teachers), community institutions, collective activity between adults and youth, and access to the three previous domains (Lerner et al., 2014).

Positive Organizational Behavior

Luthans (2003) defined positive organizational behavior (POB) as "the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (p. 179). POB differs from positive psychology in that it is comprised of state-like concepts as opposed to dispositional trait-like characteristics and virtues (Luthans, 2002). Indeed, for a behavior to be classified as a POB, it must: be grounded in theory, be research with valid measurements; be open to development; and have a performance impact (Luthans & Avolio, 2009). Regarding leadership development, POB is directly applicable to organized programs and job-related tasks, such as career assignments or mentoring (Luthans, 2001).

Luthans (2002) conceptualized the criteria of POBs through the C. H. O. S. E. characteristics: confidence, hope, optimism, subjective wellbeing, and emotional intelligence. Confidence, sometimes referred to as self-efficacy, is an individual's sense that they can achieve desired outcomes (Czaplewski et al., 2016; Harms & Luthan, 2012). This trait can be enhanced through vicarious experiences (e.g., learning by observing others), verbal persuasion (e.g., receiving positive feedback), psychological and affective states (e.g., level of excitement, stress, or negativity within an environment), and enactive mastery experiences like task mastery (Czaplewski et al., 2016). Bandura (2000) emphasized that self-efficacy, or confidence, is the most important mechanism for positivity. Individuals differ in their belief that they possess the power to produce positive results, and unless individuals hold this belief, they have little incentive to act on their desires (Bandura, 2000).

Hope is defined as the capacity to set clear goals, the ability to envision a logical process to achieve these goals, and the motivation to complete the envisioned logical process. (Czaplewski et al., 2016; Harms & Luthan, 2012). Within leadership settings, hope can be fostered by encouraging individuals to set long-term goals and break these into smaller goals that can be more reasonably achieved (Czaplewski et al., 2016). Optimism refers to an individual's capacity to assign a positive cause to an outcome and make positive contributions (Czaplewski et al., 2016; Harms & Luthan, 2012). Subjective wellbeing encapsulates one's mood, emotions, and satisfaction, including with life or a job (Czaplewski et al., 2016). This trait is often equated with happiness, but that characterization is generally considered too simplistic. Happiness is primarily determined by external circumstances and does not capture the nuances of subjective wellbeing. Lastly, emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive and interpret the emotions of others and adjust one's own emotions accordingly to facilitate emotional growth (Czaplewski et al., 2016). This construct includes abilities such as empathy, self-awareness, and adaptability.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry operates under the fundamental assumption that organizations move towards what they study (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). It is overly simplistic to generalize appreciative inquiry to just the positive aspects of a situation. Instead, appreciative inquiry refers to the process which forces individuals to think outside of their psychological comfort zone and reality, thereby making available decisions and actions that were previously unavailable or unacknowledged (Bushe, 2007). Indeed, focusing on an individual's interests streamlines their involvement in the problem-solving process by inviting them to ask positive questions, such as *which circumstances maximize program effectiveness?* and *what possibilities have not yet been considered?* (Lamm & Lamm, 2018; Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2012). Simply asking people to change may provoke resistance, but inviting them to be responsible for this change and create a better future for their organization may evoke cooperation and coordination (Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2012).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program as perceived by Foundation Advisory Board members. We achieved this purpose via the following research objectives:

1. Create a comprehensive list of strengths associated with the Georgia 4-H program.
2. Reach a consensus on the top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program.

Methodology

To address the research objectives, a Delphi approach was employed. The data were collected as part of a larger project for the Georgia 4-H and included four major factors in the assessment of

the program. The current study focuses only on one of these factors: the top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program. Based on recommendations in the literature (Kirkman & Chen, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013), we disclose the data collection context and focus of the current study.

We utilized a modified three-round Delphi approach to determine an expert panel's consensus list of top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program. Previous studies have supported using the Delphi method to reach consensus on issues related to 4-H (see Branscum et al., 2020; Mantooth, 2004; Young et al., 2019). A review of the Delphi literature shows that ideal Delphi participants are highly trained and knowledgeable regarding the target issue content area, are well-known and respected members of the target group, and are typically selected from a population of positional leaders (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Kaplan, 1971; Ludwig, 1994). We identified and chose Delphi panel participants based on their knowledge of and leadership in the 4-H program, as demonstrated through their involvement with the Georgia 4-H Foundation Advisory Board. The panel was comprised of 31 members. Twenty-five of the 31 panelists elected to provide demographic and 4-H strengths data, resulting in an effective response rate of 80.65%. Of these 25 panelists, 60% ($n = 15$) were male and 40% ($n = 10$) were female. The mean age of panel members was 50 years, with a range from 18 to 70 years. Additionally, 80% ($n = 20$) of panelists were 4-H alumni, i.e., they were involved with a 4-H program (not necessarily within Georgia) during their childhood and adolescent years. Panelists' years of involvement with the Georgia 4-H program ranged from two to 60 years. One notable limitation is that Delphi participants were not active youth members of 4-H; therefore, the insights generated by the panel may not be indicative of program strengths as perceived by active 4-H youth members.

Data were collected between October 2018 and January 2019. Each round of the Delphi was administered according to the Tailored Design Method (Dillman et al., 2008) and delivered online via the Qualtrics survey tool (Garson, 2014). A pre-notice email was sent, prior to the survey, to all 31 panel members. Within one week after the initial pre-notice email, an additional email containing a link to the survey along with the requested response data was sent to panel members. Two days after the email with the survey link was sent, a reminder email was sent to panel members who had not yet responded. Two additional reminder messages, approximately one per week, were sent after the initial reminder message. One day before the survey closed, a final reminder email was sent to nonrespondents.

Round one of the Delphi process asked panelists to provide up to five responses, using a short word or phrase, relating to the top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program. Of 31 possible respondents, a total of 25 completed round one of the Delphi, resulting in a response rate of 81%. A total of 90 items were identified in round one. The list of items was reviewed for redundancy and clarity, with a final list of 90 items included in round two. The second round of the Delphi enabled panel members to determine the level of importance associated with the items identified in round one. Individual items were rated using a five-point, Likert-type scale. Possible responses included "1 – Not at all important," "2 – Somewhat important," "3 – Important," "4 –

Very important," and "5 – Extremely important." For items to be retained for round three of the Delphi process, a minimum mean score of 3.55 was established *a posteriori* (Garson, 2014). For the second round, 26 out of 31 possible respondents completed the item ratings, resulting in an 84% response rate. A total of 89 items were retained after round two. Additionally, one set of repetitive items was consolidated. Therefore, a total of 88 items was presented to panel members during round three. The third and final round of the Delphi was used to determine panel members' level of consensus regarding the items retained after round two. To determine whether an item should be retained, respondents were asked to select "Yes" or "No" for each item. For the third round, 22 out of 31 possible respondents completed the item consensus ratings, resulting in a 71% response rate. Based on established standards in the literature (Keeney et al., 2011), response rates of greater than 70% per round within Delphi are considered acceptable; therefore, the response rates obtained for each round of the Delphi within the current study are deemed acceptable. A threshold of 80% consensus was established *a posteriori* to determine whether an item should be retained. Eighty-seven total items were retained following round three of the Delphi.

A thematic analysis was completed on the final list of items retained from the Delphi process using the constant comparative method or CCM (Glaser, 1965). The CCM process enables a researcher to continuously compare data points and generate codes within the dataset. Through comparison of the codes, a researcher can generate categories and themes from the data. Within the current research, themes from the CCM analysis were informed by, but not limited to, themes identified within the 4-H strengths literature review, including positive youth development and positive organizational behavior. The researcher used a three-round, iterative, manual coding process, with color-coding, groupings, and data analysis completed over multiple days. Initially, individual items were assigned labels related to the item content, e.g., the item "promotes resourcefulness" was assigned the label of Life Skill Development, while the item "teaches the importance of giving back" was labeled Character Development. In the second round, individual item labels were analyzed and group according to similarities. For example, all items associated with a label of Life Skill Development were grouped into one category, and items associated with Education were grouped into a separate category. In the third round, categories were examined to see if they could be combined into common themes. Following the second round, 13 categories were identified and were subsequently pared down into seven overarching themes. For example, the three categories of Diversity, Accessibility, and Belonging were combined into the single theme of *Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion*. Peer review and debriefing were employed following the CCM analysis to improve data trustworthiness and rigor (Guba, 1981). Additionally, expert debriefing occurred with the panel of experts at the conclusion of the broader research endeavor. Specifically, the final list of retained Delphi items was consolidated in a report and presented to the expert panel during a board meeting where panelists could question or comment on the results.

Results

In the first round of the Delphi, panelists compiled a list of 90 unique responses related to the top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program. Respondents were given a chance to rate the level of importance for each of these 90 items during round two of the Delphi. The mean level of importance and standard deviation for each item identified in round one are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Delphi Round One and Two Results: Level of Importance for Top Strengths of the Georgia 4-H Program (n = 90)

Item	M	SD
Reputation	4.74	0.54
Leadership development	4.70	0.56
Growing Georgia's and America's future leaders	4.65	0.65
Communication skills development	4.65	0.57
Character building	4.65	0.49
Political support	4.61	0.50
Youth development	4.61	0.58
Leadership training	4.61	0.66
Leadership program	4.61	0.66
Leadership opportunities	4.61	0.58
Development of youth leaders	4.61	0.66
Building confidence in young people	4.61	0.50
Public speaking	4.57	0.59
Camping program	4.57	0.66
Statewide support from UGA	4.57	0.66
Enables youth to find paths for self-development to make them better adults	4.57	0.66
Life skills development	4.57	0.59
Teaches the importance of giving back	4.52	0.67
Volunteer leaders	4.52	0.67
Access to 4-H across the state	4.52	0.73
Program leadership	4.48	0.67
Programming	4.48	0.67
Produces leaders	4.48	0.59
Local county-level support	4.48	0.67
Great families that get involved in 4-H	4.43	0.66
Great kids that get involved in 4-H	4.43	0.73
Access to camps	4.43	0.73
Encourages open-mindedness	4.39	0.78
Preparing young people to tackle issues	4.39	0.66
Social skills	4.39	0.72
Promotes resourcefulness	4.39	0.66
Programming	4.39	0.72
Present all counties	4.39	0.72
Teamwork	4.39	0.84
Promotes problem-solving	4.39	0.66
Giving children in poverty a chance to better themselves	4.39	0.78
Involved donors	4.39	0.72
Community development	4.30	0.65
Association with local Extension	4.35	0.71

Item	M	SD
Education	4.35	0.65
Committed alumni that are still connected	4.35	0.71
Project achievement	4.35	0.78
Development of social skills	4.35	0.71
Teaches civic mindedness	4.30	0.70
Extensive reach across the state	4.30	0.76
Community involvement	4.30	0.70
Service component	4.30	0.70
Board leadership	4.30	0.76
Citizenship program	4.26	0.75
Alumni network	4.26	0.75
Alumni participation	4.26	0.62
Sense of belonging for youth	4.26	0.75
Offers an opportunity to belong	4.26	0.86
Alumni – general	4.26	0.62
Positive support	4.22	0.95
Broad outreach, giving youth opportunities in and out of state	4.22	0.85
Teaches citizenship	4.22	0.74
Community reach	4.22	0.67
Adult participation	4.22	0.67
Teaching young people to prepare	4.22	0.74
Creative outlet for youth	4.22	0.80
Youth and adult partnerships	4.22	0.80
Facilities	4.22	0.67
Diversity – general	4.17	0.78
Safe place to fail while building confidence to succeed	4.17	0.78
Inclusive	4.17	1.03
Diversity of programs to reach interests of everyone	4.17	0.78
Adaptability of the program	4.14	0.83
Creates a sense of community and inclusion in something larger than the nuclear family/local community	4.13	0.87
Variety of activities for different peoples' interests	4.13	0.87
Diversity of 4-H participants	4.13	0.81
Broad depth within state	4.13	0.92
Workforce readiness	4.13	0.87
Encourages diversity	4.09	0.85
Networking – general	4.09	0.85
Fosters a warm and welcoming atmosphere to people of all diverse walks of life and breaks down such barriers	4.04	0.93
Empowerment	4.04	0.77
Offers a diverse way for youth to get involved	4.00	0.90
Network building program	4.00	0.85
Environmental awareness	4.00	0.74
Focus on STEM	4.00	0.67
Focus on healthy living	4.00	0.60
Sense of belonging – general	3.96	0.77
Historical work	3.96	0.82
Environmental stewardship	3.91	0.85
Healthy living education	3.91	0.73
No dues	3.83	1.15

Item	M	SD
Opportunity for self-expression	3.78	1.00
Sense of belonging for adult volunteers	3.61	0.94
Focus on agriculture	3.35	0.98

The mean ratings of importance ranged from 4.74 to 3.35. The highest mean level of importance was associated with the item "reputation," while the lowest mean level of importance was associated with the item "focus on agriculture." The remaining top-rated items concerned skills and opportunities associated with youth and leadership development (e.g., communication skills, leadership training, and so forth). Only one item received a mean rating less than the threshold value of 3.55; therefore, 89 of 90 items (98.9%) identified in round one were retained after round two. During round three, panelists were given the opportunity to reach consensus about the remaining items associated with the top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program. Two items in the consensus listing received a consensus value lower than the 80% minimum threshold. Therefore, 87 of the 89 items were retained after round three. These items are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Delphi Round Three Results: Level of Consensus for Top Strengths of the Georgia 4-H Program (n = 87)

Item	Consensus
Youth development	100.0
Youth and adult partnerships	100.0
Workforce readiness	100.0
Volunteer leaders	100.0
Statewide support from UGA	100.0
Social skills	100.0
Service component	100.0
Public speaking	100.0
Promotes resourcefulness	100.0
Promotes problem-solving	100.0
Project achievement	100.0
Programming	100.0
Produces leaders	100.0
Presents all countries	100.0
Networking – general	100.0
Local county-level support	100.0
Life skills development	100.0
Inclusive	100.0
Growing Georgia's and America's future leaders	100.0
Giving children in poverty a chance to better themselves	100.0
Focus on STEM	100.0
Focus on healthy living	100.0
Environmental stewardship	100.0
Environmental awareness	100.0
Empowerment	100.0
Education	100.0
Development of youth leaders	100.0
Development of social skills	100.0
Creative outlet for youth	100.0

Item	Consensus
Community involvement	100.0
Communication skills development	100.0
Citizenship program	100.0
Character building	100.0
Camping program	100.0
Building confidence in young people	100.0
Broad outreach, giving youth opportunities in and out of state	100.0
Board leadership	100.0
Association with local Extension	100.0
Alumni – general	100.0
Access to camps	100.0
Access to 4-H across the state	100.0
Leadership training	94.7
Leadership program	94.7
Extensive reach across the state	94.7
Teaches the importance of giving back	94.4
Sense of belonging – general	94.4
Safe place to fail while building confidence to succeed	94.4
Preparing young people to tackle issues	94.4
Leadership development	94.4
Fosters a warm and welcoming atmosphere to people of all diverse walks of life and breaks down such barriers	94.4
Facilities	94.4
Enables youth to find paths for self-development to make them better adults	94.4
Committed alumni that are still connected	94.4
Alumni network	94.4
Adaptability of the program	94.4
Reputation	94.1
Variety of activities for different people's interests	94.1
Teamwork	94.1
Teaching young people to prepare	94.1
Teaches civic mindedness	94.1
Teaches citizenship	94.1
Sense of belonging for youth	94.1
Program leadership	94.1
Opportunity for self-expression	94.1
Offers an opportunity to belong	94.1
Offers a diverse way for youth to get involved	94.1
No dues	94.1
Network building program	94.1
Leadership opportunities	94.1
Involved donors	94.1
Healthy living education	94.1
Creates a sense of community and inclusion in something larger than the nuclear family/local community	94.1
Community development	94.1
Positive support	93.8
Great kids that get involved in 4-H	93.8
Great families that get involved in 4-H	93.8
Community reach	93.8

Item	Consensus
Diversity – general	88.9
Broad depth within state	88.9
Diversity of programs to reach the interests of everyone	88.2
Diversity of 4-H participants	88.2
Alumni participation	88.2
Adult participation	88.2
Political support	88.2
Sense of belonging for adult volunteers	87.5
Encourages open-mindedness	84.2
Encourages diversity	82.4

Of the 87 items retained after the third round of the Delphi process, 76 items achieved an individual consensus rating between 90% and 100%, including 41 items that achieved a unanimous individual consensus rating. Following round three, the retained items were analyzed using the CCM (Glaser, 1965), which yielded seven unique categories encompassing the 87 items retained after the Delphi process. Table 3 details the categories and their associated items.

Table 3. Constant Comparative Method Thematic Analysis Results (n = 87)

Categories	Number of Items Overall	Number of Items with 90-100% Agreement
Character and Life Skills Development	18	17
Social skills		
Promotes resourcefulness		
Promotes problem-solving		
Life skills development		
Environmental stewardship		
Environmental awareness		
Empowerment		
Development of social skills		
Character building		
Teaches the importance of giving back		
Safe place to fail while building confidence to succeed		
Teamwork		
Teaching young people to prepare		
Teaches civic mindedness		
Teaches citizenship		
Opportunity for self-expression		
Positive support		
Encourages open-mindedness		
Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion	17	12
Presents all counties		
Inclusive		
Access to camps		
Access to 4-H across the state		
Sense of belonging – general		

Categories	Number of Items Overall	Number of Items with 90-100% Agreement
Fosters a warm and welcoming atmosphere to people of all diverse walks of life and breaks down such barriers		
Adaptability of the program		
Variety of activities for different people's interests		
Sense of belonging for youth		
Offers an opportunity to belong		
No dues		
Creates a sense of community and inclusion in something larger than the nuclear family/local community		
Diversity – general		
Diversity of programs to reach interests of everyone		
Diversity of 4-H participants		
Sense of belonging for adult volunteers		
Encourages diversity		
4-H Organization – Leadership and Support	15	11
Volunteer leaders		
Statewide support from UGA		
Local county-level support		
Community involvement		
Board leadership		
Association with local Extension		
Alumni – general		
Committed alumni that are still connected		
Alumni network		
Program leadership		
Involved donors		
Great families that get involved in 4-H		
Alumni participation		
Adult participation		
Political support		
Programming and Opportunities	12	12
Service component		
Programming		
Focus on STEM		
Focus on healthy living		
Education		
Citizenship program		
Camping program		
Leadership program		
Offers a diverse way for youth to get involved		
Network building program		
Leadership opportunities		
Healthy living education		
Leadership and Professional Development	9	9
Workforce readiness		
Public speaking		
Produces leaders		

Categories	Number of Items Overall	Number of Items with 90-100% Agreement
Networking – general		
Growing Georgia's and America's future leaders		
Communication skills development		
Leadership training		
Preparing young people to tackle issues		
Leadership development		
Youth Development	8	8
Youth development		
Youth and adult partnerships		
Giving children in poverty a chance to better themselves		
Development of youth leaders		
Creative outlet for youth		
Building confidence in young people		
Enables youth to find paths for self-development to make them better adults		
Great kids that get involved in 4-H		
4-H Organization – General	8	7
Project achievement		
Broad outreach, giving youth opportunities in and out of state.		
Extensive reach across state		
Facilities		
Reputation		
Community development		
Community reach		
Broad depth within state		

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to identify the top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program as indicated by Foundation Advisory Board members. Ninety strengths were initially identified, with 87 strengths reaching a level of expert consensus greater than 80%. Therefore, Delphi participants agreed with 80% consensus or more that these 87 items were the top strengths of the Georgia 4-H program. Furthermore, of the 87 strengths that were retained following the Delphi process, 87% ($n = 76$) achieved an individual consensus rating between 90-100%. Therefore, an overwhelming number of qualities contribute to the robustness and success of the 4-H program.

Lerner et al. (2000) proposed that positive youth development can be categorized according to the five C's: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. The results of the current study may provide Extension agents and 4-H educators with guidelines for which strengths to emphasize to maximize the potential for positive youth development within the Georgia 4-H program. For example, strengths related to *Leadership and Professional Development* and *Youth Development* may aid in building positive youth perceptions of their vocational, academic, and cognitive skills. Confidence may be imparted to youth participants

through programming guided by the strengths found in the *Youth Development* and *Character and Life Skills* domains. Additionally, the goal of connection may be fostered through emphasizing strengths found within the *4-H Organization – Leadership and Support; Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion;* and *Programming and Opportunities* domains. Forming positive, reciprocal bonds with adult mentors, interacting with peers and role models from underrepresented populations, and experiencing service leadership may all aid in increasing a youth's connection to the 4-H program and may lead to a positive impact on their life as a result of their involvement. Interacting with individuals from different backgrounds can aid in the development of caring and compassion for others. These experiences, which may facilitate the development of care and compassion, can be found within the *Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion* domain. Lastly, character may be developed within 4-H youth by emphasizing the desired traits outlined in the *Character and Life Skills* domain in future programming and curriculum.

Furthermore, Luthans (2002) conceptualized the criteria for positive organizational behaviors through the C.H.O.S.E. (confidence, hope, optimism, subjective wellbeing, emotional intelligence) characteristics. Perceptions of confidence may be enhanced through 4-H participation by emphasizing strengths within the *Youth Development* and *Character and Life Skills* domains. Hope and optimism might be facilitated at the individual level by emphasizing the development of skills (e.g., positive support, open-mindedness, and problem-solving) in the *Character and Life Skills Development* domain, as well as reiterating the support and assistance that can be found within the *4-H Organization – Leadership and Support* domain. Subjective wellbeing can result in positive team mentalities and cohesion at the group and organizational levels. Therefore, it may be possible to influence this characteristic by reiterating the mission and values of 4-H through methods described in the *4-H Organization – General* domain. Additionally, appealing to leadership roles outlined in the *4-H Organization – Leadership and Support* domain and emphasizing the support that subordinates and members can receive via the *Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion* domain may help to positively influence subjective wellbeing. Lastly, emotional intelligence may be enhanced by focusing on skills outlined in the *Character and Life Skills Development* domain within the 4-H curriculum and programming.

At the individual item level, 47% ($n = 41$) achieved a unanimous individual consensus rating. These items were found in all domains identified by the CCM analysis; therefore, it is apparent that there are individual strengths within each domain that are indispensable to the success of the 4-H program. Three domains had more than 50% of their items achieve a unanimous individual consensus rating: *Youth Development* (75%); *Leadership and Professional Development* (67%); and *Programming and Opportunities* (58%). Although this analysis is not an attempt to rank the domains and associated strengths in order of importance, it is identified as a point of reference and potential future analysis. All the domains identified in the CCM analysis and their associated strengths carry importance, and altering the implementation or facilitation of any of these strengths will impact the 4-H program. Furthermore, the intent of this study is to demonstrate

that some domains possess a majority of items regarded as indispensable to the 4-H program in that they were unanimously agreed to be strengths of the organization. Therefore, we recommend that 4-H educators and program developers emphasize the items achieving unanimous consensus in future programming and education curricula.

An overarching recommendation would be for 4-H educators and program developers to seek out opportunities and settings where multiple thematic domains may be layered to increase the influence of positive youth development and positive organizational behavior. For instance, *Character and Life Skills Development* had the most overlap between facilitating the five C's of positive youth development and the C.H.O.S.E. characteristics. Therefore, we recommend that items from this domain be purposively included in future programming methods such as those outlined in the *Programming and Opportunities* domain. For example, a practical application would be to include a character and life skills development workshop or seminar within the curriculum of 4-H programs, including service-learning opportunities, summer camps, and leadership programs.

For 4-H to truly be an organization that develops strong youth leaders, the program must first be composed of strong leaders and emphasize organizational behaviors that stimulate leadership development. 4-H educators and program developers need to emphasize positive organizational behaviors so that 4-H members can learn the skills and develop in an environment that fosters the use of such behaviors. While devising programming opportunities that emphasize the five C's of positive youth development are a foundational step, 4-H programs must also emphasize the benefits of emotional intelligence, hope, and optimism, and provide opportunities for these state-like traits to occur. These skills are crucial for youth entering higher education institutions and the professional world. To build leaders capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century, 4-H educators and program developers should instill positive organizational behaviors within youth participants by offering programming, curricula, and other opportunities that foster the development of these characteristics. The recommendations outlined in the discussion above serve as practical guides for implementing these behaviors into existing 4-H programming and developing future programming and youth development opportunities that cultivate these behaviors. We recognize that these character and life skills development opportunities are likely already occurring within 4-H programming; however, the results of this study support and reiterate the importance of their ongoing implementation.

While this study provides useful guidelines for program and curriculum design, it is critical to recognize the existing limitations. Although measures were taken to mitigate bias (Garson, 2014), the results of the Delphi process are inherently biased since they are restricted to representing only the insights and perspectives of the expert panel members who identified these items (Bödin & Crona, 2009). Members of the expert panel were selected based on a sample of those who serve in an advisory capacity for the Georgia 4-H program and thus may not represent the viewpoints and perspectives of those who do not hold leadership positions within the Georgia

4-H program. Accordingly, we recommend that future researchers interested in replicating this study sample individuals involved in 4-H who have not served in a leadership position. This would help determine whether they identify similar strengths as those who do serve in a leadership position.

The age of the Delphi participants may also limit the insights identified within this study. For example, the eldest Delphi participant was 70 years old, while the youngest was 18. It is reasonable to assume that the structure and programming of the Georgia 4-H program have fluctuated over the past 50 years; therefore, the insights of the 70-year-old participants who is reflecting on his adolescent involvement in 4-H are most likely different from the insights of the 18-year-old participant who was involved more recently as a 4-H member. Additionally, alumni status may limit the generalizability of our findings. For instance, Delphi participants who were 4-H alumni may have perceived different strengths of the Georgia 4-H program than Delphi participants who were not 4-H alumni, or even from Delphi participants who had been members of a 4-H program in a state other than Georgia. Therefore, we recommend that future researchers replicate this study or validate the findings presented here with 4-H programs in other states or with exclusively 4-H alumni, as these may reveal additional insights not found within this study.

A final limitation is the limited number of items removed throughout the various rounds of the Delphi process. As described in the Methodology, the current study was part of a larger project which included multiple foci. For continuity between focus areas, *a posteriori* cutoff values were employed consistently across research areas. As a consequence, the results of the present study may be more inclusive than might otherwise have been achieved. An associated recommendation would be to use the results from the present study to further inform and refine 4-H programmatic strengths beyond the state of Georgia.

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