

6-1-2007

## Volunteers' Perceptions of the Volunteer Management Practices of County Extension 4-H Educators

Megan Sinasky

*The Pennsylvania State University*, mus119@psu.edu

Jacklyn Bruce

*The Pennsylvania State University*, jab743@psu.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

---

### Recommended Citation

Sinasky, M., & Bruce, J. (2007). Volunteers' Perceptions of the Volunteer Management Practices of County Extension 4-H Educators. *The Journal of Extension*, 45(3), Article 28. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol45/iss3/28>

This Tools of the Trade is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).



## Volunteers' Perceptions of the Volunteer Management Practices of County Extension 4-H Educators

### Abstract

A quantitative study was conducted to collect preliminary information on volunteers' perceptions of the volunteer management skills and practices of Cooperative Extension educators. Findings included that volunteers were able to articulate that Extension educators: use a contingent reward style of management, enable volunteers to take the lead on projects and in committee work, and recognize and reward their volunteers in a way that celebrates the volunteer's unique characteristics and contributions. Recommendations include professional development for educators and volunteers to develop a variety of strong administrative skills.

### Megan Sinasky

Graduate Student  
[mus119@psu.edu](mailto:mus119@psu.edu)

### Jacklyn Bruce

Assistant Professor  
[jab743@psu.edu](mailto:jab743@psu.edu)

The Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, Pennsylvania

## Introduction

Volunteers are essential to the success of Cooperative Extension programming (Steele, 1994; Patton, 1990). With current organizational climates, where professionals are asked to do more with less, the contribution of volunteers within the 4-H program is continuing to become more and more vital. Because 4-H Youth Development educators are taking on the role of volunteer administrator, it is important to evaluate where or not they have the skills necessary to be successful at engaging and retaining their volunteers. Research was conducted to collect preliminary information with the intent to provide a template or direction for future staff development.

## What the Researchers Found

The research team conducted a quantitative study of current 4-H volunteers within a Northeast state. Individuals were asked to rate the county educators' use of various skills essential to volunteer administration. In this case, respondents were able to articulate or identify that Extension educators:

- Tend to use a contingent reward style of administration.
- Enable volunteers to take the lead on projects and in committee work.
- Recognize and reward their volunteers in a way that celebrates the volunteer's unique characteristics and contributions.

Participants were able to identify that educators use a contingent reward type of management style more so than any other style, including influence, intellectual stimulation, or management by exception. Volunteers also acknowledged that they felt a high degree of satisfaction with this type of style and felt it was the most effective style for the situation.

Participants felt that, as a whole, educators did not role model effectively enough, giving them an average grade of C+. Volunteers identified that Extension educators needed to be better at modeling specific types of behaviors, including how to set and reach goals, how to treat others, and how to develop and enforce standards of excellence for individuals and groups.

Volunteers believe that, as a whole, educators do not believe that they make a difference or are passionate about their job or the work that they do, giving them an average grade of C. This, in turn, does not inspire the volunteers to become committed to the program and eventually leads to drop off in the numbers of volunteers.

Volunteers identified that, as a whole, educators do not find ways to change the status quo, find ways to improve the Extension organization, or look for ways to create learning opportunities, giving the educators an average grade of C-. Volunteers want educators to take risks that will lead to positive change and provide opportunities for volunteers to learn and try new things and to make changes in the organization for long-term improvement.

Participants in the study gave Extension educators a B- for their ability to build teams. Volunteers believed that educators made them feel capable to fulfill their current volunteer position and believed that they had the autonomy to act and make decisions based upon those roles.

Finally, volunteers gave the educators a B- for their ability to recognize the contributions of the organization's volunteers. Whether via a formal awards ceremony or a personal gesture of thanks, volunteers felt like the educators celebrated accomplishments.

## Tools for the Future

Cooperative Extension is a volunteer-driven organization, using volunteers not just in the 4-H program, but in all program areas (agriculture, natural resources, family living, horticulture, and community development). Thus the management of volunteers is paramount to the success of the organization as a whole. The ways in which educators practice effective leadership skills when working with volunteers will lead to stronger volunteer recruitment and retention for all program areas.

Extension educators should be provided with a tailored series of educational opportunities that will maximize their effectiveness as volunteer administrators. Educators should be trained in areas of volunteer management that will emphasize the importance of strong skills in these areas including role modeling, providing learning and growth opportunities to volunteers, and inspiring volunteers to become (more) committed to their organization. By engaging in such an effort, educators may reform practices, philosophies, and behaviors to better serve their volunteers.

Similar to the educators, volunteers should receive educational opportunities in creating opportunities for themselves to grow as volunteers, role modeling for new volunteers, building strong work teams, and recognizing collective and individual accomplishment. Simultaneous training will strengthen the framework in which all individuals are working from within the organization.

State Extension staff need to ensure that training and development programs that are provided to the educators are accurately addressing the current needs of the educators not only for their perspectives, but the perspectives of their constituents as well. This provides educators with opportunities for personal growth as well as answering some professional development concerns. In turn, educators need to be more aware of the training and development programs that are provided to volunteers. These programs should be addressing their needs as individuals and as a group in order to foster collaboration, team development and growth opportunities like those described earlier in this study.

Finally, training in the discipline of volunteer management should be implemented at all levels and in all program areas of the Cooperative Extension organization. This only strengthens the organization's capacity to deliver needs based programming to the constituent base.

## References

Patton, M. Q. (1990). Editor's page. *Journal of Extension* [On-line]. 28(3). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1990fall/ed1.html>

Steele, D. L. (1994). *Volunteer leader inventory*. Rotary training guide. Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN

*Copyright* © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the [Journal Editorial Office, joe-ed@joe.org](mailto:joe-ed@joe.org).

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)

