

# the 4-H program assistant's role

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The number of 4-H program assistants has increased dramatically in the last three years. The development of an effective youth staff team of professionals, program assistants, and volunteers gives rise to the need for a role model for youth program assistants. In North Carolina, we developed a conceptual framework and a process for the identification and development of a role model.

Adult volunteers continue to be the mainstay of the program. However, professional youth staff members are expected to provide new, additional leadership for the development of the program. Three factors related to the professional staff are evident. First, youth staff members are encumbered with repetitive and routine tasks that don't require professional expertise. As a result, recruiting and keeping professionals is difficult. Second, the expansion of the program requires more time and effort to recruit and train volunteers. Third, the involvement of additional volunteers and the broader scope of the program have increased the competency level youth staff members need.

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It's significant that the expansion of the program has been achieved without an increase in the number of professional staff. And, although more professional staff are needed, limited resources provide for opportunities for employing additional graduate-level personnel.

## **Paraprofessional Approach**

One solution is the use of paraprofessionals or program assistants. The paraprofessionals approach has two significant benefits. First, as a staffing alternative, it compensates for a

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shortage of professional staff and/or restricted budget allocations. Secondly, these positions, which don't require professional training, provide meaningful jobs for adults eligible only for low-level nonprofessional jobs. At the same time training for future advancement is provided.<sup>1</sup>

Program assistants are usually full- or part-time, trained, indigenous adults hired to work in their own neighborhoods under the supervision of a professional. Their ability to recruit leaders and members, organize clubs, teach leaders and members, and help with events and other tasks has been demonstrated.<sup>2</sup> These assistants release professionals from time-consuming routine tasks and act as a "bridge" between families in the community and Extension.

The relationship of professional youth staff members, program assistants, and volunteers in the 4-H program is crucial to program effectiveness because each makes a unique contribution to the attainment of the program's goals. Edwin L. Kirby, administrator of the Extension Service-USDA, says "there is a need for clear role definition of professionals, but within the context of a teamwork approach to programming."<sup>3</sup>

The youth staff member must give some of his responsibilities to the new team member—the 4-H program assistant. As program assistants assume their responsibilities, the professional staff members will be freer to be innovative, to experiment, and to develop new programs to meet the needs of young people and maintain the essential contributions of the volunteers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Administrative and supervisory staff can use the sociological concept—role—to provide a framework for developing the staffing pattern using volunteers, program assistants, and professionals. Role is defined as the set of expectations and appropriate behaviors for a person occupying a particular position. Identifying roles and expectations provides an orderly view of the Extension youth team.

An analysis of the role of 4-H program assistants, in relation to the professional youth staff members and volunteers, locates the program assistant's place in Extension hierarchy. The volunteer maintains his position at the present level, while the youth staff member moves upward in the hierarchy with the program assistant as the intermediate position. This hierarchy is diagrammed in Figure 1.

With the creation of a new hierarchical level, the differences in expectations must be identified and efforts made to resolve them if program assistants are to provide maximum contributions toward program goals. Effectiveness is increased when each person knows, understands, and accepts his role. Differences in role expectations pinpoint variability in attitudes, values, and personality characteristics that may create poten-

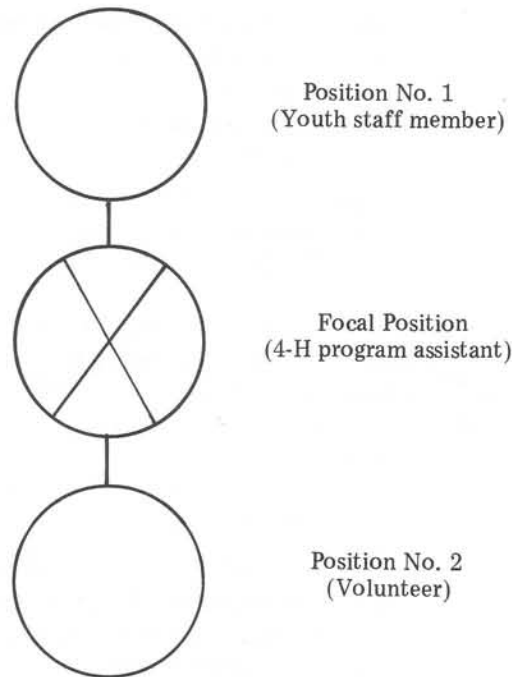


Figure 1. Model for 4-H program staff team.<sup>4</sup>

tial team conflict. In these situations, role expectations may have to be changed, or training may be needed so assigned roles will be understood and accepted.

A role model for 4-H program assistants must be a realistic description of responsibilities. Program assistants must be able to perform the activities or be able to readily learn them.

### Task Identification

To function effectively, 4-H program assistants must be assigned specific tasks that clearly define their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, this role model consists of a series of role tasks that the program assistant is expected to fulfill. Each task is separate and distinct and requires some physical or mental activity. To the extent possible, tasks are described in terms that define the activity to be performed.

First, the tasks essential to the total 4-H program must be identified, and then assigned to the youth staff member, the program assistant, and volunteers. Since all three positions may relate to the same task, the responsibilities of each position must be clearly stated. The identification of tasks essential to the 4-H program can be an involved process. A review of research related to the roles of professional youth staff members revealed nearly 300 different tasks.<sup>5</sup>

To simplify the development of the model, similar individual tasks can be grouped into functional categories. When the tasks are expressed in behavioral terms, the

subject matter in each functional category may change, but the behavior will be similar.

In North Carolina, the following functional categories, based on the programming schema of Boone, Dolan, and Shearon,<sup>6</sup> were used:

1. Maintenance—activities related to support, supervision, and program renewal.
2. Needs—activities related to needs identification and analysis.
3. Planning—activities related to selecting program objectives and organizing learning activities.
4. Execution—activities related to implementing, mobilizing, and monitoring teaching-learning experiences.
5. Evaluation—activities related to measuring the effectiveness.

Specific tasks assigned to the functional categories will depend on the situation the program assistant is working in. The assignment will vary according to the experience and capabilities of the professionals, the program assistant, and the volunteers.

In North Carolina, a panel of experts identified the following 50 tasks they considered representative for each functional category.

*Maintenance* Included here are activities related to the support, supervision, and program renewal.

- Serves as a public relations person for the 4-H program and Extension.
- Interprets 4-H program and Extension policies and procedures to volunteer leaders and the public.
- Acts as a liaison person between the 4-H staff members and the community.
- Maintains good working relations with other youth groups by helping keep channels of communication open.
- Assists the 4-H staff members to develop with volunteers an understanding of 4-H philosophy, objectives, and methods.
- Helps 4-H staff members to develop good relationships between the 4-H program and donors, civic groups, business groups, and government officials.
- Participates in county Extension staff conferences.
- Counsels with 4-H staff members on policy changes and assists in implementing new policies.
- Serves as liaison between the 4-H staff, volunteer leaders, and members.
- Assists the 4-H staff members in the promotion of projects and activities.

*Needs*

These are activities related to needs identification and analysis:

- Helps volunteers determine the purposes and objectives of 4-H activities and events.
- Helps identify the needs, interests, and problems of youth.
- Helps volunteer 4-H leaders understand the opportunities and responsibilities the leaders have in helping identify the needs of youth.
- Communicates needs of local people to 4-H staff members.
- Reads and keeps up to date on the needs, interests, and problems of youth.
- Reads and keeps up with current 4-H program information.

*Planning*

These are activities related to selecting program objectives and organizing learning activities.

- Understands immediate- and long-range program goals and helps volunteer 4-H leaders plan learning experiences for youth to meet these goals.
- Helps 4-H staff members determine program objectives.
- Helps 4-H staff members plan and develop volunteer leader training.
- Helps volunteers locate resources for the support of local 4-H programs.
- Helps volunteer 4-H leaders plan a yearly program including meetings, project work, special activities, and a calendar of events.
- Helps 4-H staff members develop and maintain effective advisory committees.
- Prepares materials for teaching volunteer 4-H leaders and members.

*Execution*

These are activities related to implementing, mobilizing, and monitoring teaching-learning experiences:

- Counsels with volunteer 4-H leaders on how to work with parents and other leaders.
- Organizes special project clubs to meet particular needs and interests of youth.
- Visits volunteer 4-H leaders to help them with local club problems.
- Supervises the organization of local 4-H clubs.
- Identifies key citizens who might support or work with the 4-H program.
- Conducts training meetings to improve the leadership abilities and competencies of junior leaders.
- Advises county junior leaders' association or older youth groups.

- Conducts leader training meetings on a local or community basis.
- Trains volunteer 4-H leaders in subject-matter skills.
- Suggests resource people to present information at local meetings.
- Attends volunteer 4-H leader meetings and keeps leaders informed about meetings.
- Conducts county 4-H events and activities as assigned.
- Explains 4-H to youth—individually and in groups.
- Trains volunteer 4-H leaders to supervise the operation of the local program.
- Helps coordinate local 4-H activities with the county program.
- Helps select local club or community project leaders, activity leaders, and junior leaders.
- Informs youth, parents, and other adults about the 4-H program.
- Assists 4-H staff in providing materials and resources for volunteer leaders to use in training members.

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#### *Evaluation*

Evaluation activities are related to measuring the effectiveness of the program.

- Helps assist 4-H staff members evaluate county activities.
- Helps 4-H staff members determine the effectiveness of methods and procedures used in the programs.
- Occasionally attends local 4-H meetings to help evaluate the program.
- Helps volunteer 4-H leaders evaluate growth and development of members.
- Makes recommendations for the improvement and strengthening of the program.
- Confers with the professional staff members on the progress, problems, and results of 4-H activities.
- Periodically helps volunteer 4-H leaders evaluate their effectiveness.
- Reports training needs and other help needed by the volunteer leaders to the 4-H staff member.
- Keeps essential records required by Extension.

#### **Summary and Implications**

An analysis of roles related to a new organizational position has pragmatic value. Cooperation and effectiveness among team members who are primarily depending on an understanding and acceptance of the role of each staff member can be greatly increased. Moreover, role expectations must be congruent with overall goals of the organization.

This 4-H program assistant's role model is based on the contemporary needs of Extension. It uses research data to

establish the new position as an integral part of a team of professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers. This model also helps to identify position qualifications and to determine needs for pre-induction and on-the-job training, supervision, and personnel evaluation. It provides a basis for developing highly competent professional youth staff members and evaluating the total youth program.

The model as outlined is a quasi-experiment. It was used in North Carolina to evaluate a staffing pattern that included paraprofessionals performing these "ideal roles." Six 4-H program assistants were trained to carry out their responsibilities. They worked with 2 youth staff members and 56 volunteer leaders.

At the end of an 18-month implementation period, the "ideal model" was analyzed.

Without exception, the two 4-H staff members who supervised the program assistants rated all the tasks appropriate. They felt the model provided an adequate basis for the program assistant's job description.

The six program assistants also agreed that all tasks, except "prepare materials for teaching volunteer leaders and members," were appropriate.

The volunteer leaders indicated strong support for the tasks in the role model. Fifteen percent or more of the leaders questioned the appropriateness of the following tasks:

- ✓ Prepares materials for teaching volunteer leaders and members.
- ✓ Supervises the organization of local clubs.
- ✓ Conducts junior leader training meetings to improve their leadership abilities and competencies such as camp counseling.
- ✓ Helps select project leaders, junior leaders, and activity leaders needed by the club.

Thus, at the close of the test period, the 50 tasks included in the ideal model were generally perceived as appropriate by the professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteer leaders. In evaluating the staffing model used in the pilot program, Lewis, Kiesow, and Lyday reported "conclusive evidence that indicated a high degree of program effectiveness. Both from the standpoint of quantity and quality, the staffing model reached all expectations."<sup>7</sup>

Although the North Carolina studies indicated a high degree of acceptance of the model, variation did exist. In assessing the value of the model, it's important to note that tasks that fit the specific thrusts of a particular program area must be selected. There's ample evidence that this model can serve as a guide for developing a strong youth staff team and implementing an innovative, creative youth program.



## Footnotes

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2. D. S. MacVean, *A Study of New York Agent's Perception of the Role of the Sub-professional in the County 4-H Program* (Master's thesis, Department of Adult Education, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, 1968); V. J. McAuliffe, *4-H Operation Expansion* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Extension Service-USDA, 1967); Gerald R. Olson, *The Role of the Subprofessional in the Cooperative Extension Service* (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Adult and Community College Education, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, 1970); and Jerry Parsons, "Inner-City Youth Programs: Guidelines," *Journal of Extension*, IX (Summer, 1971), 31-40.
3. Edwin L. Kirby, *Expanding 4-H Nutrition Education Through a Team Approach* (Presentation at National Training Workshop on 4-H Nutrition Education, Dallas, Texas, 1970), p. 16.
4. N. Gross, W. S. Mason, and A. W. McEachern, *Exploration in Role Analysis Studies of the School Superintendency Role* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958), p. 54.
5. John A. Kiesow, *Role Model for the Paraprofessional Youth Worker in the Extension Service* (Raleigh, N.C.: North Carolina State University, Agricultural Extension Service, Office of 4-H, 1972).
6. E. J. Boone, R. J. Dolan, and R. W. Shearon, *Programming in the Cooperative Extension Service: A Conceptual Schema*, Miscellaneous Extension Publication 72 (Raleigh, N.C.: Agricultural Extension Service, 1971).
7. Charles E. Lewis, John A. Kiesow, and Susan Y. Lyday, *The Functional Developmental and Evaluation of a Youth Staffing Model Utilizing the Ideal Role of the Paraprofessional Youth Worker*, Special Project Report No. 12-05-300-191 (Washington, D.C.: Extension Service-USDA, 1974), p. 59.

**coming in next issue**

- **teachers of adults will...**
- **yes, a change agent  
can evaluate!**