

Value of Adult Volunteer Leaders In The New Mexico 4-H Program

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ABSTRACT

Volunteers are an integral part of America's 4-H program. Funding sources, however, frequently require government and nonprofit organizations to not only justify budget requests, but to also hold them accountable for the expenditure of public dollars. The purpose of this study was to determine the dollar value of volunteer time contributed to the New Mexico 4-H program. A profile of adult volunteer leaders in the New Mexico 4-H program was developed by describing personal characteristics, types of volunteer activities (or roles) engaged in, the estimated amount of time devoted to these volunteer activities, monetary donations contributed and motivational factors for volunteering. The economic value of the typical adult volunteer leader's time was determined by calculating the average number of hours spent in one year by a volunteer and multiplying that number by the average hourly wage for nonagricultural workers (\$14.30) as determined by the Independent Sector in 1999. Subjects in the study were sampled from New Mexico 4-H volunteers enrolled as leaders for at least four years as of May 1998. The profile of the typical New Mexico 4-H volunteer in this study was female, age 41-45, of Caucasian race who is married, working full time with an average family income of over \$50,000 annually. Most leaders had been a 4-H project leader for about eight years. Volunteers spent an average of 369.5 hours per person annually for a contribution of \$5,284 each.

INTRODUCTION/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Volunteers are an integral part of society and progress. Throughout our history the individual and united volunteer actions of thousands of unnamed citizens have had an impact on American society including caring for the disabled, poor or infirmed, volunteer fire departments, cultural and civic programs such as museums and libraries and as political action committees and groups. Volunteerism is making a very needed transformation within its institutions and programs in order to better meet the vital, relevant needs of society (Independent Sector, 1999; Ellis, 1986). Recent trends indicated that the number of volunteers in public and governmental agencies are increasing. The Independent Sector (1999) reports that 56% of all American households volunteered in 1998, a 13.7% increase since 1995. This represents more than 109 million volunteers over the age of 18.

Volunteers are used extensively in America's 4-H program. Enrollment records maintained by National 4-H Council in 1999 indicated that 534,294 volunteers donated their time and energy working with youth as volunteer leaders with local 4-H clubs and assisting with 4-H youth development programs that reached over six and half million youth ages 5 to 19. In a 1985 national landmark study (Steele, Finley, & Edgerton, 1989), the ratio of time spent by 4-H volunteers and 4-H agents was 59 to 1 for 4-H activities connected with volunteers. Seventy

percent of 4-H agents surveyed felt that working with volunteers was their most important job responsibility.

Despite the increase in the number of individuals volunteering, a misconception exists that volunteers represent cheap labor and are used to replace or decrease professional staff. However, in light of budget reductions and restrictions, volunteers are needed to maintain adequate levels of service to clientele and to prevent the loss of professional staff. Brudney's (1990) research on volunteers in the public sector found that although volunteers are considered unpaid staff, an effective volunteer program is not inexpensive to manage. Brudney recommended that the decision to use or not use volunteers in an organization should be based on the cost of the program as compared to the level and quality of services provided, as well as any other advantages to the sponsoring organization.

Funding sources frequently require government and nonprofit organizations to justify requests for monetary support in the budgeting process and hold them accountable for the expenditures of public dollars. Funders also expect a return on their investment. Assessing the economic value of volunteer time to the organization is one approach to determining a rate of return. Learning about volunteers, such as what motivates them, what activities they participate in, how much time they are contributing, and the economic value of that time can help institutions increase efficiency and effectiveness. Several researchers have sought to describe volunteers by social characteristics (Clark & Skelton, 1950; Denmark, 1971; Parrott, 1977; Culp, 1996), motivators (Henderson, 1981; Rohs, 1986; Rouse & Clawson, 1992; Culp, 1997; Fritz, 2000), and activities participated in (Clark & Skelton, 1950; Culp, 1996; Culp, 1997), but few have sought information relevant to economic benefits and contributions. If an agency or organization can obtain monetary estimates of the value of services provided to clients by volunteers, they can be weighed against the expenditures of the program and a measure of effectiveness can be determined (Brudney, 1990).

Research concerning 4-H Youth Development and volunteers has been conducted in several states (Clark & Skelton, 1950; Culp, 1997; Denmark, 1971; Fritz, 2000; Parrott, 1977; Sawyer, 1980; Steele, 1985). While the overall value of volunteer contributions has been documented as valuable to the 4-H program, the specific nature and extent of the support given by these unpaid staff members still remains unmeasured in New Mexico.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to determine the dollar value of the volunteer time contributed to the New Mexico 4-H Program. A profile of adult volunteer leaders in the New Mexico 4-H Program was developed by describing personal characteristics, types of volunteer activities (or roles) engaged in, the estimated amount of time devoted to these volunteer activities, monetary donations contributed, motivational factors for volunteering, and volunteer's comments related to their roles. Specific research objectives for this study were:

1. To describe respondents according to number of years as a volunteer 4-H leader, type of 4-H leader, number of children in 4-H, previous membership in 4-H, gender,

- ethnicity, marital status, employment status, occupation, age, educational background, family income, and place of residence.
2. To determine what activities adult volunteer leaders are involved with during a New Mexico 4-H program year.
 3. To determine how much time adult volunteer leaders devote to the New Mexico 4-H Program.
 4. To determine the amount of monetary donations adult volunteer leaders contribute to the New Mexico 4-H program over a year's time in the form of phone calls, mileage, and supplies furnished.
 5. To determine what motivates adult leaders volunteer for the New Mexico 4-H program.
 6. To determine the economic value (dollar value) of the typical adult volunteer leader's time spent in the New Mexico 4-H Program during a 4-H program year.
 7. To qualitatively describe volunteer's comments related to their role as a 4-H volunteer.

METHODS/PROCEDURES

The study was descriptive in nature. A mail questionnaire was used. The population of the study was New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service adult volunteer leaders enrolled for at least four years in the 4-H program as of May 1998 (N = 1,134). Volunteers who had served for four years were utilized in this study to reduce the limitation of a volunteer's ability to recall time contributed. It was believed that volunteers who had experienced a role or activity more than once were more likely to provide a credible estimate of time spent. A random table of numbers was used to select 265 of the 1,134 New Mexico adult volunteer 4-H leaders (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

The instrument used was adapted to this study from a previous instrument (Sawyer, 1980). The instrument contained six sections, which addressed the seven stated objectives. Section one of the survey asked volunteers four write in or categorical questions that determined magnitude and type of leader involvement. Section two of the instrument asked volunteers to state reasons or motivation for volunteering with the New Mexico 4-H program. A checklist of thirteen items from the literature was provided, with an additional open ended "Other" category to identify the top two reasons or motivations for volunteering with New Mexico 4-H. Section three used categorical questions for volunteers to estimate the dollar amount contributed to the 4-H program over the period of one 4-H program year from October to September. Four items were listed in reference to monetary contributions: phone calls (local), long distance or pay phone charges, mileage, and supplies furnished. Section four identified program activities of volunteer leaders and asked them to specify how much time they spent on each of the activities each month over a one year period. This section was designed in a matrix form. The left side listed eleven program activities performed by 4-H volunteer leaders and an "Other" category. Each month of

the year was listed across the top. Section five of the survey contained open and closed categorical questions to gather demographic data on each volunteer. Section six provided opportunity to share thoughts and comments.

Content and face validity was assessed using a panel of experts in research/statistics, 4-H/youth development, volunteerism, and economics. Changes were made in the matrix to have volunteers list the amount of time spent using hourly categorical responses. Reliability was assessed using a test-retest procedure with 30 volunteer leaders in New Mexico that were not selected to participate in the original study. A minimum percent agreement of 70 was set *a priori*. No statements, questions or subcategories were deleted.

Data were collected in February through June, 1999 following Dillman's (1978) procedures for a mail questionnaire. Instruments were coded with an identification number to track and follow-up with non-respondents. Three mailings were conducted. Telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of 20% of the non-respondents using the entire questionnaire as a guide. The data from the interviews were compared to data from mailed questionnaires. No differences were found to exist and the results were generalized to the target population (Miller & Smith, 1983). The final usable response rate was 74% (n = 187).

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency and variability were used to describe the data. The economic value of the average leader's time was determined by multiplying the median number of hours served per year by the hourly wage of \$14.30 determined by the Independent Sector's 1999 hourly wage for nonagricultural workers. Qualitative data were summarized by analyzing content for common themes.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Objective One

Volunteers, on the average, had served for eight years. The majority (64%) of these volunteers were project leaders, who previously had or currently have children participating in 4-H. Fifty-eight percent had also been 4-H members themselves. Three-fourths of the volunteers were found to be female, 90.6% were Caucasian, and 92.3% were married. Almost 73% were employed full time mostly in the fields of accounting/office management, teaching/education, or self-employment. The age of the leaders ranged from 31 to 55, with the greatest number in the 41 to 45 age group. Forty-one percent had attended a college or university, while 33% had completed a college or university. Approximately 42% reported a family income of over \$50,000. Almost half of the volunteers lived on a farm or a ranch. The profile of New Mexico 4-H volunteers is similar to ones found in previous studies (Gallup Organization, 1986; Manser, 1987; Steele et al., 1989; Culp, 1996; Independent Sector, 1996).

Objectives Two and Three

Table 1 shows the majority of New Mexico 4-H leader's time was spent on county-wide 4-H activities, teaching projects to 4-H youth, and participating in or preparing for local 4-H club

meetings or activities. The least amount of time was spent on recruiting members or leaders, serving on state-wide committees, and receiving or giving 4-H leader orientation or training. Volunteers in New Mexico are concentrating their time to teach youth life skills through projects and club meetings. Steele et al., (1989) found that Extension volunteers were an important community resource, utilized to teach, plan, and implement programs in the areas of agriculture, home economics, community development, and youth development. Clark and Skelton (1950), supported more recently by Culp (1996), found that volunteer 4-H leaders considered the following their most important tasks: helping members with projects and teaching them practical skills, developing desirable character traits in young people, interesting members in 4-H Club work, and advancing 4-H Club work in the community. Volunteers usually complete these tasks as a project leader, organizational leader, or club activity leader (Steele et al., 1989). The majority of time served by volunteers in this study was found to be during the months of June through September, due to the great number of activities implemented through the 4-H Program during this time period

Table 1

Respondents= Total Mean Hours by Activity per Year (n=187)

Activity	Mean Hours	Standard Deviation
Participating in county-wide 4-H activities	68.1	61.9
Teaching projects to 4-H youth	63.7	86.3
Participating in local 4-H club meetings or activities	63.7	71.9
Preparing for local 4-H club meetings or activities	49.8	55.8
Participating in state-wide 4-H activities	43.8	46.3
Coaching county, district and/or state contests	36.9	60.6
Serving on county-wide 4-H committees	27.8	51.1
Recruiting 4-H members (or leaders)	21.0	32.6
Serving on state-wide 4-H committees	18.5	56.7
Receiving 4-H leader orientation or training	13.1	16.0
Giving 4-H leader orientation and training	12.6	15.7
Other	5.9	33.0

Table 2 shows the distribution of total hours spent by respondents for all of the activities listed in Table 1. The minimum number of hours any one particular respondent spent during the year was 7.5 hours. The median number of hours was 369.5 and the maximum number of hours spent by any specific respondent was 2,364 hours. Data represented a positively skewed distribution. The number of volunteer hours reported in the 25th percentile was 179 hours while

574.5 hours was reported at the 75th percentile. In addition the 10th percentile is 73 hours and the 90th percentile is 765.5 hours. The 90th percentile together with the maximum indicates the relatively wide span of values over which the upper 10% are distributed (10% of the respondents fell between 765.5 and 2,364 hours).

Table 2

Distribution of Total Hours Spent (n = 187)

Minimum	25 th percentile	Median	75 th percentile	Maximum
7.5	179	369.5	374.5	2,364

Objective Four

The majority of leaders made fewer than 25 calls per year and spent under \$50 on long distance/pay phone charges, and less than \$50 on program supplies. Steele et al. (1989) found that over half of volunteers provided some amount of funds, facilities, or supplies for Extension activities. 4-H leaders in New Mexico are implementing programming while not having to expend too much out of pocket expenses. In this study the majority of New Mexico leaders drove more than 500 miles in a year for 4-H programming. Unlike more populated states, New Mexico is a very rural state geographically with only a few major urban centers, requiring greater driving distances and more time to be able to attend both in and out of county events. Nationally, in 1996 the average 4-H volunteer drove 300 to 400 miles and spent approximately \$50.00 of their own money (4-H Statistics, 1998).

Objective Five

Motivations for volunteering were that their children were 4-H members, that 4-H was a good organization, and that they enjoyed working with youth. This is consistent with findings from Culp (1996) and Steele et al. (1989). Similarly, Zeuschel and Hansel (1989) discovered parents will most likely volunteer for organizations that benefit their children. In addition, other studies have found that people volunteer because of their need to belong and be affiliated to a group (Henderson, 1981) or they just want to spend time with youth and make a difference in young peoples lives (Rouse & Clawson, 1992). New Mexico volunteers have much invested in the 4-H program with a large percentage being former 4-H members and/or having children in 4-H. Forty-two percent of the volunteers reported they had not previously been 4-H members. There is a vast population of potential volunteers in New Mexico that has not been reached that could benefit from the positive aspects of and contribute to the 4-H program. Some under represented groups are male and minority populations, college students, senior citizens, urban based families, and people established in lower income brackets with lower education levels.

Objective Six

Using the 1999 average hourly wage for nonagricultural workers (\$14.30) provided by the Independent Sector and the median number of hours contributed, the economic value of average New Mexico adult 4-H leaders' time was \$5283.85. Applying this dollar figure, New Mexico volunteers ($N = 1,134$) contributed an estimated \$6 million to the New Mexico 4-H program in 1998. 4-H leaders in New Mexico are highly involved, making significant contributions to the programs in time and money. In 1996, the average 4-H volunteer nationally served about 220 hours per year (4-H Statistics, 1998). Steele's (1985) national study found that volunteers were also of assistance to Extension and to Extension staff, by expanding the hours of contact that Extension agents could not begin to provide with its current level of funding. The value of the time contributed by volunteers far exceeds the amount of time secured through paid staff. New Mexico volunteers in this study reported volunteering more time than in previous studies. Although no definite explanation exists as to why this figure is higher than previous studies, several explanations are possible. New Mexico is considered a rural state. The majority of volunteers surveyed lived on a farm or a ranch. 4-H in New Mexico is a natural pastime for youth living in rural areas and is considered a way of life for many New Mexico 4-H youth and volunteers. Research supports that people are more likely to volunteer in programs compatible with their beliefs and values and in activities that their children are involved in. Additionally, volunteers in this study have been leaders for four or more years, indicating a proven dedication to the 4-H program and commitment of time necessary for multiple project activity meetings, fairs, and events. Steele et al. (1989) concluded that the 4-H Program could not survive without its supportive volunteer component.

Objective Seven

In general, New Mexico leaders felt that 4-H is a positive program that teaches youth life skills such as responsibility, leadership, and community service. Without the 4-H program in their lives, respondents stated they would have felt cheated out of many wonderful experiences. In addition, volunteers made many suggestions for improvement, including: encouraging and recognizing community service projects more, providing more scholarship opportunities, and providing more updated curriculum and project materials. Respondents also felt that individuals who sign up as 4-H leaders should be dedicated to the goals and mission of the program. Volunteers should have high expectations from the youth they work with, encouraging participation among both members and parents. Volunteers stated that as leaders they sometimes felt overwhelmed and that it is important that they feel the agent's support and enthusiasm for all aspects of the program. They felt that leader training is a positive part of the 4-H program and should be emphasized more.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. When defining the profile of a New Mexico 4-H adult volunteer, it was found that the

4-H program could be expanded by implementing recruitment strategies that target the non-traditional or under-utilized volunteers; including male and minority populations, college students, senior citizens, urban based families, and individuals established in a lower income bracket with lower education levels.

2. Volunteers are an important resource to the 4-H program. They are utilized to teach, plan and implement many programs. CES should continue to emphasize leader involvement in the areas found to have had the most time served in, which were county-wide activities, teaching projects to youth, and preparing for local club meetings or activities. Research has found that volunteers are more motivated and effective in serving areas they have an investment in. However, more time should be invested by 4-H Program administrators to promote leader involvement in activities found to have had the least time served in such as state-wide committee involvement, recruitment, and volunteer training if they wish to expand and increase the educational program relevance of these areas.
3. The economic value of the median New Mexico adult 4-H volunteer leader's time, for the period of one year was determined to be \$5,283.85. In 1998, 1,134 volunteers who had served at least four years were enrolled in the New Mexico 4-H Program. Using this dollar figure, New Mexico volunteers contributed an estimated \$6 million in time and talent to the state 4-H program in 1998. 4-H Program administrators should use this information to demonstrate the significance and relevance volunteers have to the New Mexico 4-H Program. The figures should be used to address additional funding needs for the 4-H Program in New Mexico.
4. The majority of leaders made less than 25 calls per year, spent under \$50 on long distance/pay phone charges, and less than \$50 on program supplies. CES should continue to keep these out of pocket expenses at a minimum, by allowing leaders to make long distance phone calls from their local office and through providing project materials at a low cost.
5. The majority of leaders in New Mexico drove more than 500 miles in a year for 4-H programs. This is higher than the national average. A mileage reimbursement program should be initiated for volunteers, driving their own personal vehicles, who drive an average of 500 miles per year or more. The reimbursement program could be initiated through 4-H County Councils and fundraising events.
6. When recruiting volunteers, findings from this study should be used to help answer questions such as, "How much time would I be spending?" "What activities would I be expected to be involved with?" "When would I be expected to serve?"
7. Volunteer leaders spent the least amount of time receiving or giving volunteer orientation or training. It is recommended that 4-H Program administrators provide high quality, frequent volunteer orientations and training during the slower months of the year, when leaders are more likely to have time available to devote to leader training.

8. New Mexico 4-H volunteers identified specific volunteer training needed or desired. Volunteer orientation and training should be provided to increase the level of understanding of volunteer leader and parent expectations, to teach leaders how to empower youth and adults, and to instruct them on how to delegate responsibilities to help reduce their feelings of stress. Volunteers also expressed an interest in increasing emphasis on recognizing and improving community service projects, how to search out service projects that will have an impact on their community and how to obtain recognition for the service. Leaders also stated a wish to increase funding and awareness of scholarship opportunities through 4-H.
9. Volunteers indicated they wished to be provided with more updated curriculum and project materials. The state-wide curriculum committee should continue to review all project materials on a rotational basis, with special emphasis on high enrollment project areas. Project revisions and/or adaptations of projects from other states should be made in a timely manner. Additionally, leaders should serve as representative members of the committee.
10. In-service training on volunteer management should be provided to assist agents in coordinating a strong volunteer development program that meets the needs of their volunteers.

The information collected from this study can be used by both state and county staff and New Mexico to help improve programs, recruit volunteers, and justify the spending of public dollars for 4-H programming. Research findings can be used for program planning, recruitment and accountability purposes. The program planning and recruitment aspects are primarily useful to Cooperative Extension Service Staff. For example, average hours spent by adult volunteer leaders in different project areas will be available to use in recruiting when potential volunteers ask, "How much time would I likely be spending?" Monthly patterns of activity for adult leaders will be available to determine months when most leaders would be active and open to respond to surveys, training sessions, and information concerning new aspects of certain projects.

The data relating to the nature and extent of leader involvement can be used for accountability purposes (impact figures relating to time spent by volunteer leaders in support of their leadership activities) and can be shared with funding agencies, donors, and sponsors, as well as to provide recognition to volunteers serving in the program. Finally, general background data on volunteer leaders will enable a leader volunteer profile to be formulated containing characteristics of New Mexico 4-H volunteer leaders to aid in recruitment efforts.

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