

FAE4-HA Program of Excellence Entry

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Alachua County 4-H Volunteer Voices Program

Situation and Need

In recent years, Florida 4-H has set a goal of increasing 4-H membership from 200,000 to 300,000 youth across the state. Grant et al. (2020) found that 4-H volunteers help youth gain leadership skills (98%), improve decision-making skills (97%), and become ready for careers (96%). Therefore, to reach a larger population of young people with quality programs, a strong volunteer base is needed. While the number of volunteers in Alachua County has increased, so has the number of club members participating in the program. Thus, it is important to continue the development of the volunteer program capacity to be able to reach an increasing number of youth. A 2021 review of the Alachua County 4-H volunteer program determined that volunteers did not feel supported, clubs were siloed, and there were mutual frustrations between the 4-H office and volunteers. Therefore, the Volunteer Voices program was created to address these needs.

Objectives

- Annually, 60% of the needs volunteers identified in the annual needs assessment will be addressed each 4-H year as measured by a nominal group technique to support club leader retention and success in club management.
- Annually, to increase club capacity, 50% of 4-H clubs will have three or more club leaders through recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers as measured by 4-H Online volunteer enrollment data.

Timeline

Meeting these objectives is a continuous process, so the timeline of this program is not limited overall. However, when the need for a strong volunteer foundation was recognized, August became the primary time for the annual pieces of the program, including the mandatory training and needs assessment.

Plan of Action

To achieve these objectives based on the 2021 volunteer program review, a program called Volunteer Voices was created. This program consists of the following components:

Leader Training

Annually, Alachua County 4-H conducts one mandatory leader training on risk management, finances, and youth protection for Level 2 screened volunteers. All volunteers are required to complete an online youth protection training at the start of each 4-H year.

Needs Assessment

Each year, a needs assessment is conducted for club leaders using a nominal group technique, resulting in a prioritized list of needs to be addressed in the upcoming year. Volunteers are asked “What support do you need as a 4-H club leader from UF/IFAS, your 4-H office/agent, your co-leaders, other club leaders, and/or families in your club?” Therefore, the resulting list represents needs that could be addressed at the club, county, and state levels. Subsequent programming focuses primarily on club- and county-level needs.

Leader Networking Meetings

All club leaders are given the opportunity to attend quarterly leader networking meetings. These meetings provide mentorship for newer club leaders, and opportunities for all club leaders to share relevant ideas and tips for creating successful 4-H club environments. The goal of these meetings is to allow experienced club leaders to mentor newer leaders, and for the newer leaders to bring fresh. These meetings also aim to connect clubs and prevent the silo effect.

4-H Club Leader Observation Visits

4-H clubs in Alachua County meet one to four times per month during the school year. This agent strives to visit each 4-H club at least once per year to observe club leaders and provide support as they facilitate life skill development with their youth club members. This allows for one-on-one mentorship between the agent and each volunteer.

Evaluation and Outcomes

The main way that this program is evaluated is by looking at how many needs have been addressed, along with a few key indicators such as number of leaders per club, 4-H member participation, and qualitative volunteer reports. As a result of the Volunteer Voices program:

- 60% (n=72) of identified needs have been addressed since 2021. In 2024, 64% (n=22) of the identified needs were addressed.
- Also in 2024, 62.5% (n=16) of clubs exceeded the minimum of two club leaders, with most of these having four or more leaders. Volunteers report feeling more supported and connected to the other clubs.
- 100% (n=16) of Alachua County 4-H clubs were represented by 4-H youth in county-level programs and 82% (n=16) of Alachua County 4-H clubs were represented by 4-H youth in state-level programs, indicating club leaders were sharing information and encouraging participation as taught in training in 2024.
- The Volunteer Voices needs assessment has been shared with over 150 4-H professionals nationwide, and multiple 4-H professionals from other states have indicated that they will begin implementing it with their local and/or statewide programs. One other state reported success in implementing the Volunteer Voices program with their 4-H volunteers.
- Meeting volunteer needs has resulted in a higher quality youth development program because many of the volunteer needs center around information sharing. Families have indicated that new initiatives stemming from the volunteer needs assessment have given their children more opportunities to participate in 4-H programming.

Continuation Plan

The Volunteer Voices program has been used consistently since 2021 including each of the four main components. The needs assessment in particular has become an integral part of the planning process for each 4-H year, and it is very easy to replicate in a variety of methods. There has been an in-person version, live online version, and an asynchronous online version of the needs assessment, all of which were successful in capturing a variety of prioritized needs. Additionally, in 2024, the needs assessment was replicated for Master Gardener Volunteers (approximately 60 people), as well as at the state Volunteer Forum (approximately 100 people).

Collaborations

The main partners in this Volunteer Voices program are the volunteers themselves. Without their participation, contributions, and efforts in assisting with meeting their own identified needs, the program would not be as successful as it is, especially given how much of the program is optional outside of the annual training. Additionally, the partnerships with the county and the State 4-H office have provided free meeting space for trainings and networking meetings.



ALACHUA COUNTY 4-H VOLUNTEER VOICES 2023-2024 IMPACT REPORT

Each year at the annual volunteer training, we work together to create a list of needs for club leaders. Over the past three years, 60 unique needs have been identified, and 31 of these have been addressed in some capacity. I hope you will continue to join me in identifying and addressing club leader needs so we can work together to Make the Best Better.

-Your 4-H Agent, *Marydee Sale*

2023 Needs Assessment

Priority 1

connecting with UF departments, more youth/parent participation, educational activities across ages

Priority 2

4-H Online user friendliness, speakers for club meetings, more adult volunteers, "What is 4-H" flyer

Priority 3

how to structure meetings, notifications on county-wide events, electronic payments, train-the-trainer events

Priority 4

embryology kits, more state events

Priority 5

remote meetings, closer shooting sports trainings, online content, chicken coops, quarterly meetings for youth, bulk snack closet, community garden for clubs at office, pig scales

Priority 6

larger archery shed

91% of clubs were represented
at state-level programs

54.05% of clubs had more than 2 club leaders

100% of volunteers demonstrated youth development skills

In-Progress Projects

- List of UF departments with contacts
- 4-H club "starter pack" with flyers, giveaways, and other marketing resources
- 4-H parent "starter pack" with information including why parents should step up as club volunteers



IMPACT

\$245,868

Value of Volunteer Time

8,360

Volunteer Hours

94

Volunteers

371

4-H Club Members

**15 4-H CLUBS SERVING
ALACHUA COUNTY YOUTH**



76.25% of club members improved at least one **life skill** through 4-H club participation



Seven State Executive Board members and one state officer



\$109,006 in funding received including **van** and **endowment** donations



2,010 **students** reached through 4-H **In School** programming

Volunteer Voices

NEEDS ASSESSMENT



2024

Priority 1

access to club funds

Priority 2

shooting sports instructor training
electronic payments/square

Priority 3

volunteer name tags/IDs

Priority 4

county calendar with ages and registration deadlines

Priority 5

list of local partners

Priority 6

email alert for new members
4-H app
t-shirt design ideas
new member ambassador
fundraising ideas
tax exempt/donor letter
longer response time for decisions
record book training

Priority 7

email direct links
project contacts
club contacts brochure
earlier ethics dates
flyer instructions
communication platform
printed record books
state horse show at WEC
Annual 4-H dance