



2025 National Extension Conference on Volunteerism

April 22-24, 2025 – Portland, Maine

2025 Presentations

Lightning Talks

Engaging Community Partners and Stakeholders to Enthusiastically Guide Your Organization

Presenters:

- Barbara Barga, Agent Associate, 4-H Youth Development, University of Maryland College Park
- Marylisa Schaedel, Agent Associate, University of Maryland

Are you new to your program? Do you feel that your program needs a boost of new community partners, stakeholders and volunteers? How can you identify new partners and organizations to buy into your program? Learn techniques to engage your community partners and stakeholders to provide new ideas that will help to energize your program, This lightning presentation will help you to think "think out of the box"!

Volunteer Training Needs: A Nominal Group Technique Approach

Presenter:

- Dallas Meringolo, Extension Agent I/4-H Youth Development, University of Florida

Volunteers are central to the 4-H program's success, impacting the quality of positive youth development experiences. Quality training is crucial for volunteers to effectively deliver educational experiences, directly influencing the program's success (Arnold et al., 2009).

Traditionally, training topics were agent-driven with minimal volunteer input. To address this, a more collaborative and volunteer-centric approach was adopted. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was utilized to gather insights directly from Lake County 4-H volunteers, ensuring tailored and relevant training. This inclusive method identified specific training needs, enhancing the volunteer experience and program outcomes.

Climate Forward Trees

Presenter:

- Mimi Enright, Program Manager, UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County

In 2021 the University of California Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County partnered with the City of Santa Rosa to develop a recommend palette of tree species that are likely to thrive in our projected climate in the years 2050-2100. Forecasted changes in our region's climate will require heightened focus and forward-thinking programs that will enable the community and its residents to thrive. Trees provide critical ecosystem services and are an effective, inexpensive way for individuals to participate in solutions to address climate change and its impacts. We utilized California climate change projection tools and a methodology called "substitution of space for time" to project the future climate for Santa Rosa and select a city with a current climate similar to the projected climate of Santa Rosa. We used a weighting model based on 8 selection criteria to rate the trees. The list of Climate Forward Trees that our program developed is part of a long-term educational outreach campaign to promote the use of appropriate tree species to plant now. The presenter will share background on the project and process for tree selection as well as the methodology to replicate the program.

AEMTV 2.0: Continuing Education from the Achieving the Extension Mission Course

Presenters:

- Jenae Hansen-Gross, 4-H Volunteer Development Field Specialist, South Dakota State University Extension
- Jamie Morris, 4-H Volunteer Development Specialist, Purdue University

The Achieving the Extension Mission Through Volunteers (AEMTV) course piloted in 2015 and has since set the precedent for novice Extension professionals working with Volunteers to enhance and deliver programming. AEMTV 2.0 builds from this foundation and are designed to help Extension professionals grow/hone their skills in a focused aspect of Their volunteer management and development duties. These shorter, deep dive courses provide timely resources and expert information to challenges facing Extension professionals.

Three courses have been developed and delivered by the North Central Region Volunteer Specialists, with additional ones in the works. Learn more about these courses, the importance of continued learning, and the benefit of collaborating/connecting with

colleagues from across the nation in support of Extension volunteers.

National Extension Conference on Volunteerism 2025 Proposal Review – This lightning talk/poster will highlight the goals and impact of the Achieving the Extension Mission Through Volunteers 1.0 and 2.0 courses along with an overview of 2.0 topics, participation information and information for the 2025 course offerings.

Bridge the Gap: Moving Master Gardener Volunteers from Science-Based Curriculum to Hands-On Involvement

Presenter:

- Stephanie Harrington, Natural Resource Program Coordinator, ISU Extension and Outreach, Polk County, Iowa

Extension provides an exceptional science-based academic course program in horticulture for Master Gardeners volunteers, yet many Master Gardeners often finish training not knowing how to get started as a volunteer in their counties. Many county offices face challenges with an ever-changing world and volunteer pool. This lightning talk will share ideas and strategies that address how to engage volunteers, create buy-in, and leave them feeling confident and ready to take charge in their volunteer roles. Onboarding and hands-on skill application are essential to produce skilled and prepared Master Gardener volunteers. It is the role of county coordinators to provide training and volunteer opportunities that meet the needs and expectations of today's volunteers. Participants will leave with practical, strategic ideas and practices that they can incorporate into their volunteer training programs to produce skilled volunteers that possess the knowledge they seek, but also the community and program connections they need to get started.

Curated Literature as Continuing Education for Master Gardener Volunteers

Presenter:

- Alicia Herzog, Iowa Master Gardener Program Coordinator, Iowa State University

There has long been demand from the Master Gardener population for approved continuing education credit for reading literature. This program aims to fill that gap while defining a clear scope of acceptable reading material and demonstrable learning. A quarterly suite of reading materials was made available to program participants through email. Participants have one quarter (3 months) to read the materials and complete a quiz through Qualtrics. Participants who successfully completed the quarter were awarded one hour of continuing education toward their annually required minimum. This session will share data from the pilot study and allow for discussion of the viability of this type of continuing education for Master Gardener volunteers.

We Want You: Recruiting Military-Connected Youth & Adults as Volunteers

Presenter:

- Jenny Jordan, Navy 4-H Youth Program Specialist, Navy CYP/NC State University

More than 1 million individuals are active military service members. These are our soldiers, sailors, airmen, guardsmen, guardians, and marines who serve on our installations worldwide along with those who are our reserve units living in nearly every community in the U.S. and donning a uniform for weekend duties and often deployments. These million men and women enlist with them 2.5 million family members. These family members frequently move with their service member every two years, settling in a new community. They are not necessarily legacy families; they are not necessarily legacy families in our 4-H program; they have not had an Extension program touch their lives or enroll their kids in 4-H. Yet these families want to connect with local communities and can be excited and engaged volunteers. Gaining a sense of belonging, instilling a sense of contributing to others, and fostering an ethic of service are only a few benefits these individuals experience from their volunteer activities. As we look at who is in our community can we afford not to consider the barriers we have for them to volunteer and perhaps find a way to open our doors?

Online Asynchronous Master Gardener Training

Presenter:

- Dr. William Lester, University of Florida Extension

For many counties, finding enough residents interested in becoming Master Gardeners can be challenging. To attract more qualified trainees and offer the program to a more diverse community, I developed and implemented the first Canvas Classroom online training program in Florida nearly ten years ago. This approach expanded the number and diversity of potential Master Gardeners who otherwise might not be able to attend all in-person training. We transitioned to asynchronous course completion nearly two years ago with bi-annual hands-on training events. This change allows residents to become Master Gardeners conveniently, saving significant time and effort for the agent and staff. Since we implemented this type of training 18 months ago, 20 new trainees have enrolled, eight have finished training and are involved with the program, eight have dropped out, and four are currently in training. The total number enrolled is slightly higher than in past years, and the percentage of those completing training is nearly what we have seen in past years. The Hernando County Master Gardener program has evolved into a more diverse volunteer program by reducing barriers to becoming involved.

Training Efforts to Expand Outreach Capacity in Gardening

Presenter:

- David Lowenstein, Extension Educator, Michigan State University

MSU's Lawn and Garden Hotline and Ask Extension provide Michiganders with answers to issues related to trees, lawns, flowers, insect pests, and more. Over 8100 questions were answered in 2023, and a team of 36 MSU Extension Master Gardeners assist staff in addressing plant-related questions. Volunteers are trained to join as responders on Ask Extension and the Hotline through Diagnostic Academy, a multi-day program that equips volunteers with the diagnostic tools to help Michigan residents. Volunteers received support from specialists in horticulture and entomology and professional development through cohort-specific trainings. For the previous 3 years, this training has been free of charge due to grant funding. This presentation will describe recruitment and training efforts between 2022 – 2024 and resources to sustain volunteer engagement. While new responders joined due to participating in each individual training course, over 50% of individuals enrolling in the courses did not join as advanced level volunteers. I will share how knowledge gains from the program led to more sustainable gardening practices and suggestions to recruit volunteers more likely to join as responders.

The Ripple Effect: How Small Actions Lead to Big Impacts in Volunteer Programs

Presenter:

- Kristie Popa, 4-H Extension Agent, University of Florida IFAS

Join us for "The Ripple Effect: How Small Actions Lead to Big Impacts in Volunteer Programs." This session explores how minor changes in volunteer programs can have significant impacts on both organizations and communities. Through interactive discussions and real-world examples, attendees will learn practical strategies for onboarding volunteers, tools for success, and effective volunteer recognition. By understanding the power of small initiatives, participants will be equipped to enhance their volunteer programs, leading to more engaged volunteers and greater community impact.

Economic and Environmental Benefits of Ask the Master Gardener Plant Clinics in Sumter County, FL

Presenter:

- Lisa Sanderson, Residential Horticulture Extension Agent and Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator, UF/IFAS Extension Sumter County

The Ask the Master Gardener Volunteer Plant Clinics provides all Sumter County residents unbiased diagnostic support utilizing UF/IFAS Extension research-based recommendations. Ask the Master Gardener Plant Clinics are currently offered at two locations every week throughout the year except for holidays. The Ask the Master Gardener Plant Clinics have been offered since 2014. Residents visit plant clinics to talk with Master Gardener Volunteers from 9 am to 3 pm on Mondays and Fridays.

Residents visiting the clinic complete a form indicating their plant or lawn problem. The Master Gardener Volunteers will consult with the residents and complete recommendations as well as indicate the number of insects, turf diseases, or plant diseases if determined. The lab fee for insect identification is \$8.00, turf diseases fees are \$75.00, and plant disease identification is \$40. The economic value of the plant clinics is based on the savings to residents the cost of labs. Volunteers also identify IPM recommendations.

Participants at this lightning round will receive a copy of the clinic form as well as the form allowing residents to anonymously self-identify their race, ethnicity and gender.

Teaching Volunteer Competencies through Online Lunch-and-Learn Trainings

Presenters:

- Jo Williams, Extension Educator, 4-H Ohio State University Extension
- Erin Dailey, Extension Educator, Ohio State University
- Kristy Watters, Extension Educator, Ohio State University
- Rachael Fraley, Extension Educator, Ohio State University
- Jo Bauman, Extension Educator, Ohio State University

The presentation will share information on how a team of Extension professionals from southern Ohio created Lunch-and-Learn Zoom series to help 4-H volunteers from across the state meet their annual competency training requirements.

The team identified topics that included Club Finances and Fundraising, Effective Club Communication, Member Retention and Engagement, Creating Positive Club Culture, and Posters that Pop! Those topics were selected to meet volunteer competencies identified by Ohio 4, and specific needs that those educators saw within their county programs. By offering multiple formats for training, the educators provide options that many busy

volunteers seek in order to stay involved, and still feel a personal connection to the program. The presentation will share promotional pieces, lessons, and evaluation results from the program, which will be going into its third year in 2025. The Zoom trainings were recorded, branded, and then shared on a YouTube Channel, along with a link at the end to a Qualtrics survey, to verify completion. This gave volunteers two additional opportunities to complete their mandatory annual training.

Posters

The Power of Marketing Creativity

Presenters:

- Joshua Bliss, 4-H Educator, University of Wyoming
- Gretchen Gasvoda, 4-H Educator, University of Wyoming

Marketing is an art that few know about and it can seem daunting. The Power of Marketing Creativity workshop is designed to help identify what is valuable in each product, service, or idea that volunteers could have and establish routes of communication that are in essence marketing. Teaching activities/curriculum in the session will be shared as tools for extension professionals to help their volunteers build an understanding of marketing their creativity.

Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth through Outdoor Recreation Activities Utilizing Adult Volunteer Mentors

Presenters:

- Shannon Cromwell, Extension Professor, Utah State University Extension
- Cindy Nelson, Extension Professor, Utah State University Extension
- Elizabeth Davis, Extension Associate Professor, Utah State University Extension
- Brandi Reber, 4-H Coordinator, Utah State University Extension
- Muria Everitt, 4-H Afterschool Coordinator, Utah State University Extension

Sanpete County's 4-H Outdoor Recreation Program was established in response to a county-wide needs assessment and utilizes an innovative approach to strengthening protective factors for youth ages 6-18. By implementing high quality, hands-on, outdoor-focused learning experiences, youth have gained external and internal developmental assets which aid in healthy development. Grant funding provided opportunities for 35 youth to participate in weekly outdoor activities, including hiking, kayaking, outdoor cooking, fishing, rappelling, knot tying, and GPS and compass skills. Additionally, 10 adult volunteers served as mentors for the program and provided expertise and support for the activities. Evaluation results indicated that organized, experiential outdoor recreation activities implemented by caring adult volunteers were an

effective venue for providing positive youth experiences that support an increase in healthy habits and prosocial behaviors, as well as provided opportunities for career exploration.

Utilizing Community Volunteers to Actively Engage Families in STEM Nights

Presenters:

- Elizabeth Davis, Extension Associate Professor, Utah State University
- Shannon Cromwell, Extension Professor, Utah State University

Community-based programs that promote hands-on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) principles, along with incorporating a parental component, have demonstrated effectiveness in engaging youth and families in the areas of STEM education. By recruiting local volunteers with expertise in various STEM fields, families are given the opportunity to participate in a hands-on educational STEM experience. Participating in Extension hosted Family STEM Nights, parents or guardians gained an increased understanding of the importance of STEM-based education, and youth participants gained valuable skills that will be beneficial for their future college and career pathways.

4-H Volunteer Ventures Podcast

Presenters:

- Kelly Dziak, 4-H Agent, Rutgers University
- Laura Bovitz, 4-H Agent, Rutgers University

Welcome to 4-H Volunteer Ventures, a podcast that explores the fun, but sometimes confusing role of the 4-H volunteer. Each episode explores a specific aspect of the 4-H volunteer experience from enhancing the club member experience to surviving Fair season. The purpose of the podcast is to present current information to volunteers through a conversational format that builds statewide connection between volunteers of all experience levels. The podcast also highlights success stories and best practices from current volunteers, alumni, and faculty/staff. Episodes are released every other Wednesday and promoted through Facebook and the monthly NJ 4-H Family Digest email news blast. Podcasts are a popular media for continued learning among adults ages 50 and under. Volunteers access podcast episodes at their convenience through a variety of phone apps and websites. Listeners can complete an episode during their commute, exercise, or other daily routines. This poster session will detail the methodology behind the podcast, audience demographics, current and episode topics, and information for replication.

5 Year Study: Master Gardener Volunteers Benefit from Program Participation

Presenter:

Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) are a highly trained corps of volunteers who expand extensions outreach and education by providing research-based horticultural information and education to county residents. After an intensive 50 hour training on horticultural principles, the volunteers participate in a variety of volunteer activities including gardening, providing diagnostic services, youth and adult education, writing articles for newsletters, and testing soil pH. A program objective is that 75% of MGVS will report improved wellbeing as a result of participating in the MGV program. From 2019 to 2023, annual surveys have been distributed to assess the benefits to participants health and wellbeing that have been derived from participating in the program both as a volunteer and as a volunteer in a garden setting. 5 years of annual surveys demonstrated that as a result of participating in the MGV program: 87% (n=168) feel physically healthier; 77% (n=170) experienced reduced levels of stress; 88% (n=171) experienced improved mental health; 78% (n=169) increased social connectedness; 88% (n=171) increased overall life satisfaction; and 91% (n=170) feel they make a difference in their community.

Empowering your Volunteers: Developing Program to Pass along to Volunteers

Presenter:

- Jessica Gardner, Horticulture Outreach Coordinator, University of Nevada, Reno Extension

This poster will help the volunteer coordinator see different methods of developing programming, incorporating volunteers and feel confident that they can make mistakes and update programming as needed. Building programming can be overwhelming for volunteers and often ends up in the hands of more confident volunteers. By providing a template, the audience, topics, and tools, to the volunteers we have a better chance of success not only for the volunteer but also for the coordinator.

AEMTV 2.0: Continued Education from the Achieving the Extension Mission through Volunteers Course

Presenters:

- Jenae Hansen-Gross, 4-H Volunteer Development Field Specialist, South Dakota State University Extension
- Jamie Morris, 4-H Volunteer Development Specialist, Purdue University Extension

AEMTV 2.0 is a short professional development course offered in the spring for all Extension professionals that work with volunteers. It is built on the foundation of Achieving the Extension Mission Through Volunteers and delivered by the North Central Region Volunteer Specialists. AEMTV 2.0 takes a deep dive into specific challenges facing Extension professionals who work with volunteers and provide timely resources and expert information to help you grow your skills and strategies. Come learn about the course for yourself or others in your state as well as how to get involved in future development and delivery of the growing menu of professional development opportunities. Current AEMTV 2.0 courses include: Identifying When and How to Have Challenging Conversations with Volunteers, Data-Driven Volunteer Identification, and Working with Volunteer Boards.

Untangling the 4-H Club Management Knot

Presenter:

- Dorothy Munn, Policy and Risk Management Educator, MSU Extension

In late 2022, a review of information in the 4-H Online database and chartered group records indicated that there were issues with 4-H volunteer-led groups not properly chartered and having records of individuals aligned with the groups no longer engaged as active volunteers. Many groups had also become inactive following the COVID-19 pandemic and were not correctly disbanded. Much like the rest of the country, MI 4-H Youth Development experienced significant staff turnover, making record retention difficult. Our main objective in data cleaning was to enhance data quality and usefulness, leading to more dependable information. Over a year, a standardized process was phased in to access information, correct discrepancies, and establish a new system for 4-H group establishment, edits, and closures. Utilizing a Qualtrics survey, this new system promises to streamline our processes and provide more accurate and up-to-date information for better decision-making. After Extension professionals review the Untangling the 4-H Club Management Knot poster, which captures the details of the reorganization of the MI 4-H Youth Development club management process, they will better understand strategies for accurately overseeing their group management systems.

Where are All the Volunteers? Reimagining and Reigniting the Spark in Volunteerism!

Presenter:

- Rushawnda Olden, Director South Carolina 4-H Pinckney Leadership, Clemson University Cooperative Extension

Volunteerism is the heartbeat of community service and organizational growth, but as societal values shift and demographics change, traditional approaches no longer suffice. This dynamic workshop invites practitioners to reimagine their volunteer recruitment strategies with fresh, innovative tools and techniques.

Dive into an interactive experience where you'll explore the evolving landscape of volunteerism and discover how to adapt to these changes effectively. Through engaging activities and insightful discussions, you'll have the chance to apply cutting-edge concepts and develop personalized volunteer recruitment strategies tailored to your organization's unique needs.

By the end of this workshop, you'll walk away with practical tools and actionable steps to enhance volunteer recruitment and engagement. Not only will this boost your volunteer engagement, but it will also amplify the overall impact and sustainability of your volunteer-driven initiatives.

Join us to reignite the spark in your volunteer programs and transform the way you recruit and retain the passionate individuals who drive your mission forward.

The 4-H Club Kit Research Project: A Tool for 4-H Staff and Volunteers

Presenters:

- Dan Teuteberg, Associate Professor, Washington State University

Craving a tool to encourage support 4-H clubs in your county, and provide volunteers resources to be successful? Have new clubs forming and looking for a tool to help them get started? Or, maybe you have clubs transitioning volunteers, and looking for a way to create an easy, consistent club hand-off? Any 4-H staff member will benefit from learning about our 4-H Club Kit, currently in its 4th year of research. Come learn about this kit, and how you might be able to use it in your area. This kit provides tools needed for volunteer success in providing a rich/meaningful experience for youth. The kit includes activities and exercises to reinforce the youth/adult partnership model, experiential, learning, and self-governing. Kits can be customized for your unique needs and evaluations are included.

Allow Me To Introduce Myself: Understanding and Using Gender Inclusive Language and Pronouns

Presenter:

- Arnelle Quashie, 4-H Educator, University of Maryland Extension

Allow Me to Introduce Myself: Gender Inclusive Language and Gender Pronoun is an informational and interactive workshop that integrates findings, research, and storytelling to introduce and familiarize professionals and volunteers on what gender inclusive language and gender pronoun use and how to incorporate use in their teaching and work. This workshop is geared toward 4H professionals; all extension professionals can benefit from this workshop.

Through engaging activities and curious compassionate conversations, participants will learn or expand their knowledge, understanding, and practice of what gender-inclusive language and gender pronoun use are and how to use them. Our engaging and interactive conversation will

help those unfamiliar with this topic become familiar. Participants will learn best practices on how to have training and conversations with volunteers and the youth and communities they serve on gender-inclusive language and gender pronoun use. Most importantly, participants will learn how to correct and recover from the times they forget to use gender-inclusive language or misgender an individual.

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Research Sessions

Equity in Volunteer Recognition: A Case Study from the UC Master Gardener Program

Presenters:

- Marisa Coyne, Assistant Director, Volunteer and Community Engagement - UC Master Gardener Program, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Melissa Womack, Assistant Director, Impact and Communications - UC Master Gardener Program, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources

Volunteer recognition is a proven volunteer retention strategy for volunteer-based organizations. However, many formal volunteer recognition approaches celebrate volunteers with long tenures and leadership roles in the organizational hierarchy. This means volunteers with fewer years of service or more informal or change-oriented leadership roles get overlooked. As Extension programs prioritize diversity, equity, and justice as critical institutional changes and volunteer engagement goals, the diversity of volunteers in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and age is on the rise. Tenure and status-based volunteer recognition practices may disproportionately celebrate the contributions of older volunteers, white volunteers, retired volunteers, etc., presenting an equity issue. This presentation describes the current issue, provides recommendations for shifts in practice, and explores an implementation case study at the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources.

From Friction to Function: Strategies to Resolve Conflict

Presenters:

- Jayla Fry, Texas Master Gardener Coordinator, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
- Andrew Crocker, Texas Master Wellness Coordinator, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Are you someone who looks upon conflict as a challenge to overcome or would you prefer to avoid conflict at all cost? Perhaps you fall somewhere in the middle. In this session, you will learn what competencies are best for conflict resolution, what steps to take, and what to say (or not say) to mitigate conflict situations in your volunteer programs. Participants will talk through scenarios and discuss common issues facing any volunteer manager.

Enhancing Communication Strategies for Extension Volunteers Across Program Areas: Basing Communication Method on Intended Engagement

Presenters:

- Keri Hobbs, Extension Specialist - 4-H Volunteer Development, University of Georgia
- Sheri Dorn, Extension Specialist, Consumer Ornamentals, and Georgia Master Gardener Extension, Volunteer Coordinator, University of Georgia

How important is communication with volunteers? Well, the Media Richness Theory suggests that the best fitting communication for the task should yield the most positive results for completion of the task! Extension Volunteer Specialists from 4-H and EMG programs conducted a study among volunteers across program areas with UGA Extension to explore volunteer communication preferences related to volunteer engagement. By understanding these preferences, volunteer coordinators could leverage the best suited communication method for specific tasks – for the best results! By equipping Extension volunteer coordinators with these important tips and communication preferences, faculty and staff can more effectively communicate with volunteers – benefiting the local program. In this session, the presentation team will outline the theory and taxonomies used, briefly discuss the research study, reveal the valuable insights of the research topic, and discuss relevant tips for informing communication based on volunteer engagement for Extension volunteer coordination across program areas.

Exploring Personal Value Among 4-H Volunteers: Toward Enhancing Motivation and Retention in Extension Volunteers

Presenters:

- Steven Krauss, Associate Professor, 4-H State Specialist in Volunteerism and Youth-Adult Partnerships, University of Missouri
- Jenae Hansen-Gross, SDSU Extension 4-H Volunteer Development Field Specialist, South Dakota State University
- Dawn VandeVoort, Volunteer Leadership Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Jennifer Weichel, Volunteer Specialist and Co-Lead for Extension Volunteer Management, Michigan State University

In 2024, the North Central Region 4-H Volunteer Specialist Group conducted the Volunteer Impact Study, a multi-state effort to document the impact of volunteering in 4-H in the twelve-state region. The research, conducted through a Qualtrics survey, included a random sample of 1000 volunteers from each state. Using both open and close-ended questions, the study aimed to document what individuals felt they gained personally from their experiences as 4-H volunteers. Drawing on value congruence theory, research indicates that the personal value volunteers attribute to their efforts is critical for motivation and retention. This session focuses on the qualitative findings from the study, highlighting what 4-H volunteers personally value most

about their roles. After a brief presentation of the study results, participants will break into small groups and reflect on how "personal value" impacts volunteer recruitment and engagement within their own Extension domains. Small groups will share insights with the larger group, helping participants understand the importance of personal values in enhancing recruitment, motivation, and retention of volunteers across sectors.

Exploring Job Embeddedness Among Florida 4-H Extension Agents

Presenter:

- Kristie Popa, 4-H Extension Agent, University of Florida IFAS

This presentation explores the concept of job embeddedness among Florida 4-H Extension Agents and its broader implications for volunteer program effectiveness and sustainability. Job embeddedness, encompassing an individual's ties, fits, and sacrifices within their job and community, offers valuable insights into the factors influencing Extension Agents' commitment and longevity in their roles. By delving into the links, fits, and sacrifices experienced by 4-H Extension Agents, this study aims to uncover key determinants of agent job satisfaction, engagement, and retention. Attendees will gain insights into the complexities of job embeddedness among 4-H Extension Agents and discover actionable recommendations for sustaining volunteer programs and supporting agent success.

Amplifying the Voices of Volunteers: The Personal, Organizational, and Public Value of Volunteering

Presenters:

- Rachelle Vetter, Professor, Leadership and Volunteer Development Specialist
North Dakota State University
- Jill Goedeken, 4-H Volunteer and Professional Development Extension Educator,
University of Nebraska
- Pat C. McGlaughlin, Senior Program Lead, Volunteer Systems and Civic Engagement,
University of Illinois
- John Murray, Evaluation Specialist, University of Minnesota Extension

In 2024, the North Central Region 4-H Volunteer Specialists conducted a follow-up study to document the impact of volunteering for 4-H in the twelve-state North Central Region. The NCR 4-H Volunteer Impact Study was first carried out in 2019 (Grant et al., 2019; Harrington et al., 2022; O'Neil et al., 2021). In the 2019 study, the qualitative analysis focused on the public value of volunteering. In 2024, all areas of the qualitative data set were analyzed including the personal, organizational, and public impacts of Extension volunteers.

This session will explore both the quantitative and qualitative results on the impacts of Extension volunteers that can be used to inform your work and report to stakeholders. Participants will receive a copy of the preliminary results, engage in small group discussion

around the myth that “no one is volunteering anymore”, and review the new volunteer role descriptions developed using this research. Participant feedback will be gathered on how we recruit a diverse group of Extension volunteers for 2025 and beyond.

Extension Health Ambassadors: A Community-Based Volunteer Health Education Training Program for Improving Health in Rural Communities

Presenters:

- Jessica Vincent, Community and Public Health Outreach Specialist
University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service
- Heather Wingo, Program Associate – Health, University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service

Proposing a community-driven approach to amplify Extension health programming in rural areas, this program focuses on DEIA in volunteerism. Utilizing the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model and innovative engagement strategies, our project aims to address health disparities in the state’s rural populations. Participants will learn about the following: utilization of the ABCD model to recruit Extension Health Ambassadors from target communities, ensuring the representation and inclusion of diverse voices; insights into the development of tailored health education training materials; equipping volunteers with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver effective community-based health programs; explore strategies to increase access to Extension public health programs in underserved rural areas by leveraging local assets and resources. This approach prioritizes equity and inclusion, empowering rural communities to manage their health address health access challenges. Participants will gain practical insights to advance DEIA practices in volunteerism and programs, contributing to improved health outcomes for underserved communities.

Assessing 4-H Extension Agent and Volunteer Understanding and Integration of Positive Youth Development and Program Implementation Science Principles

Presenter:

- Breanna Wade, Program Associate- Volunteer and Staff Development, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture- 4-H Youth Development

As one of the largest youth development organizations in the world, 4-H prides itself on using research-backed curriculum and methods to develop and implement their programs. This not only applies to youth programs, but volunteer and professional development as well. Although data shows that being in 4-H is beneficial for young people, the diversity of programming and how it is being implemented varies vastly across the organization, which can alter implications of fidelity. This study evaluates the Florida 4-H volunteer training program and how it is being

implemented to better understand if intended training pieces are being applied and received. Through 4-H professional and volunteer semi-structured interviews and document analysis, this study provides insight to agent and volunteer perceptions, program needs, and suggestions for better practices and future research.

Understanding Volunteer Motivations: Insights from the Volunteer Functions Inventory in Extension Get Fit

Presenters:

- Heather Wingo, Program Associate - Health, University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service
- Jessica Vincent, Community & Public Health Outreach Specialist, University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service

Explore the innovative use of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) to understand and analyze the motivations of volunteers in the Extension Get Fit program. Attendees will gain insights into the motivational functions identified by the VFI and how these insights are applied to enhance volunteer engagement. This session will cover the implementation of the VFI, data collection and analysis techniques, and a detailed analysis of the motivational factors identified. It will also demonstrate how understanding volunteer motivations can improve recruitment and retention, with applications for other volunteer-driven programs.

Workshops

From Mic to Mission: Creating Engaging Volunteer Podcasts

Presenters:

- Kathleen Bohde, 4-H Youth Development Extension Educator, Purdue Extension
- Jamie Morris, 4-H Youth Development Volunteer Specialist, Purdue Extension
- Steve McKinley, Purdue Extension Staff Development Specialist, Purdue Extension

To podcast or not to podcast? Indiana 4-H says, why not! Come join the conversation to share your podcast chops, preference, and passion, or to learn from the Clover Call podcast experience. Podcasts can be engaging for volunteers when they provide valuable insights, foster a sense of community, and offer opportunities for personal growth and learning. The Indiana 4-H Clover Call podcast is designed to share information about the people and programs that make the Indiana 4-H Youth Development Program such an important part of our communities. In this session we will: Explore the value in podcasting can bring to volunteers; How to start a podcast; Lessons learned from 4 years of podcasting.

Marketing Your Program on Any Budget

Presenter:

- Prudence Caskey, 4-H Extension Agent II, University of Florida IFAS Extension

Marketing your program effectively, regardless of budget, involves strategic planning and creativity. Begin by defining your target audience and understanding their needs, preferences, and behaviors. Use this insight to tailor your messaging and select appropriate marketing channels. For low-budget marketing, leverage social media platforms. Create engaging content that resonates with your audience, utilizing free tools for graphic design to build credibility and community. Utilize email marketing to nurture leads and maintain customer relationships using cost-effective services. Medium-budget strategies can include paid social media advertising. Attending events and networking can also enhance your brand's visibility. With a larger budget, explore advanced tactics like programmatic advertising and sponsoring high-profile events. Regardless of budget, continually measure your marketing efforts' effectiveness using analytics tools, adjusting your strategies based on performance data. By being resourceful and strategic, you can maximize your marketing impact and achieve your program's goals.

Understanding the Structure, Function, and Role of Extension Advisory Councils: Increasing their Usefulness and Impact

Presenters:

- Ken Culp, III, Ph.D., Principal Specialist for Volunteerism, Evaluation and Curriculum, University of Kentucky Extension
- Hunter Carroll, 4-H Youth Development Agent, Jackson County, University of Kentucky Extension
- Jocelyn Kemp, 4-H Youth Development Agent, Hardin County, University of Kentucky Extension
- Carissa Miske, 4-H Youth Development Agent, Owsley County, University of Kentucky Extension

Master gardeners, homemakers, agriculture, and 4-H Councils expand programmatic depth and outreach. These groups are usually coordinated by an advisory council.

Advisory councils combine efforts of volunteers, stakeholders, and program representatives to provide quality educational programming. Councils accelerate educational change, strengthen program decisions, and plan learning experiences.

This workshop will present strategies for identifying the current makeup of Extension advisory councils; identifying communities, demographics, groups, program areas, delivery methods, and geographic areas underrepresented on the council and will share strategies for identifying and recruiting new members. An outline for advisory council member orientation will be shared. This

outline will help members understand the structure and function of the council, and the role of a council member.

Conducting an advisory council orientation can increase effectiveness and retention. Orientation topics may include organization, board structure, roles and responsibilities, finances, decision-making, and meetings. By adding this orientation can increase the advisory council's impact and effectiveness.

Community Health Coalitions: Volunteers as an Integrated System for Health and Wellness

Presenters:

- Jenna Daniel, Extension 4-H Specialist, UGA Extension, Georgia 4-H
- Shanda Ashley, County Coordination and 4-H Agent, UGA Extension
- Christina Garner, 4-H Agent, UGA Extension
- Cindy Sheram, 4-H Agent, UGA Extension

Community coalition-led efforts to promote health are increasingly recognized as the ideal way to promote systems change and long-term community health for current and future generations. An integral part of these coalitions is volunteer engagement, both of youth and adults withing the community. In this session, we will tell the story of multiple volunteer-engaged community coalition-led health initiatives (best practices and challenges), highlight their youth-adult partnerships, and share impact from their community focused efforts. Participants will hear firsthand from agents and youth coalition members leading this effort, and leave with activities from the National 4-H Youth Advocates for Health curriculum.

Leading Volunteers Through Community Transitions

Presenter:

- Kelly Dziak, 4-H Agent, Rutgers University

Events from the local to global levels have challenged and changed us as individuals and communities. Experts within the fields of public health, psychology, social services, and faith leadership report increasing prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression. To protect emotional and mental stability, volunteers shift their priorities to reduce commitments perceived as burdensome resulting in decreased volunteer support. Compounding the situation, factors, such as staffing transitions, increasing program expenses, and the pandemic, impact traditional programs to the extent where significant updates are required to meet community needs. As community leaders, we must acknowledge the impact of change to communities to successfully guide volunteers through the transitional process. We can encourage growth volunteer support by rebuilding and redesigning programs with a focus towards safe and supportive environments for all community members. Participants in this workshop will increase their understanding of

trauma response, learn to identify signs of community trauma, and practice change management strategies to help volunteers through programming transitions.

Evaluation with a Twist: Strategies to Assess Program Effectiveness, Gather Feedback, and Report Impact

Presenters:

- Harriett Edwards, Professor and Extension Specialist, North Carolina State University
- Ken Culp, III Principal Specialist for Volunteerism, Curriculum & Evaluation, University of Kentucky
- Jenny, Jordan, Navy 4-H Youth Development Specialist, North Carolina State

A challenge facing Extension is the need to document impact. This workshop will help participants understand differences in evaluation, assessment and impact. By exploring evaluation strategies, participants will identify both the current and most appropriate level of evaluation they are currently utilizing. End of event surveys are the typical data collection tools used to determine program effectiveness, knowledge change, and aspirational impact. However, myriad opportunities to gather information during and following Extension events to better articulate programming impacts are available. This session will provide opportunities to test alternative evaluation methods, discuss the benefits of using unique approaches to help participants and volunteers share information both during and after the learning situation. Facilitators will explain and demonstrate a variety of techniques, including storytelling, artistic reflection, journaling, graffiti walls, and focus group discussions. Learners will practice multiple evaluation activities and will leave the session with ideas for adding more energy and interaction to their evaluation work.

Bringing the 4-H Thriving Model to Life in Your Community

Presenters:

- Aimee Elkins, 4-H Youth Development Educator, UW- Madison: Division of Extension
- Penny Tank, 4-H Youth Development Educator, UW- Madison: Division of Extension
- Tracy Keifenheim, 4-H Youth Development Educator, UW- Madison: Division of Extension
- Dan Brandt, 4-H Youth Development Educator, UW- Madison: Division of Extension
- Jennifer Swensen, Wisconsin 4-H Northern Regional Program Manager, UW- Madison: Division of Extension

The Wisconsin 4-H Program Quality Team has been holding an annual 4-H Thriving Academy professional development opportunity since 2020. The purpose is to provide support to Positive Youth Development Professionals while coming together with a common definition and foundation in the science of learning and development that occurs through the use of the 4-H Thriving Model. A portion of the Academy focuses on the Wisconsin Live Thrive Kit which was modeled after the work of the North Central Region PYD Thrive Champions Group. The

Wisconsin 4-H Thriving Academy is open to all UW-Madison Division of Extension Positive Youth Development Institute Educators who have not participated in the previous offerings. The Program Quality team feels the Live Thrive Models could easily be adapted to train and support educators in other states as well as volunteers who work with youth. The delivery method could be virtual, in-person, or hybrid. Participants will learn by experiencing a variety of hands-on connection activities that tie into each topic, as well as different techniques to offer this volunteer development model.

Co-Producing Effective Learning Resources with Extension Volunteers: Impacts and Lessons Learned from Involving Volunteers in the Publication Process

Presenters:

- Joshua Farella, Assistant Agent, 4-H Youth Development, University of Arizona
- Amy Parrott, Associate Agent, 4-H Youth Development, University of Arizona
- Mike Hauser, Associate Agent, 4-H Youth Development, University of Arizona
- Ashley J.S. Menges, Assistant Agent, 4-H YDP, University of Arizona

From 2022 to 2025, Arizona 4-H faculty co-produced six Extension publications with 4-H program volunteers. These leaders served as subject matter experts, critiqued and edited educational materials for relevance, and shared specialized knowledge from years supporting the 4-H program. As of summer 2024, 4-H leaders meaningfully contributed to six peer-reviewed Extension publications, with additional works in process and review. This engagement strategy continues to be utilized by faculty to produce accurate and impactful educational resources. There were three major positive impacts of this effort. First, 4-H volunteers were engaged in a collaborative publication process with faculty which resulted in a more positive 4-H program culture. Second, volunteers' knowledge of programmatic resources and available support provided key assessment data on educational deficiencies in need of attention. Finally, Extension resources were informed by extensive volunteer experience and localized expertise, thus creating more useful and impactful tools. The volunteer engagement model utilized by AZ 4-H faculty is broadly applicable to many programs seeking to elevate the volunteer experience and create impactful Extension resources.

Best Practices for Recruiting, Training, and Engaging Public Health Student Volunteers in Cooperative Extension Programs

Presenter:

- Morgan Foster, Program Manager, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Volunteerism, particularly the involvement of undergraduate and graduate students, is a crucial cornerstone of Cooperative Extension work. As future public health practitioners, student training allows for a substantial impact at the community, regional, and state levels. For years,

the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension (AgriLife Extension) Service has provided opportunities for undergraduate and graduate-level interns and volunteers. AgriLife Extension is uniquely positioned to recruit students from various fields to address public health needs, including public health and health education-related disciplines. This engaging workshop will explore essential best practices and strategies for successfully recruiting, training, and disseminating Cooperative Extension health programs through public health student volunteers. The Public Health Trainee Professional Development Model provides student trainees with a comprehensive learning experience to enhance health education and outreach skills. The workshop will utilize case studies to discuss key strategies for engaging and sustaining public health student volunteers.

Creating Your Own Volunteer Management System - What we Learned at Illinois Extension

Presenters:

- Ramona Girtman, Volunteer System Management Associate, University of Illinois Extension
- Sheila Powers, Volunteer Relations Associate, University of Illinois Extension
- Amanda Taylor, Associate Director, Workforce Development, University of Illinois Extension
- Jason Frye, Web Applications Development Manager, University of Illinois Extension

We have all been there, you receive news of a major, mandatory process change at work. Not just any process change, but the kind of change that will fundamentally alter how you work and the way you recruit, screen, and manage your volunteers. This kind of change can stress out leadership, program staff, and even volunteers alike. The famous, gif-worthy fire drill scene from “The Office” may be playing in your head. “Oh my God... ok, it's happening! Everyone stay calm. EVERYONE STAY CALM!” Join Illinois Extension as we explore how the “change management process” influenced the design, rollout and application of our centralized volunteer management system, the Illinois Extension Volunteer Gateway. We will share our “wins” and “lessons learned” in an engaging and interactive format while offering practical tools and resources. Participants can expect to leave the session with actionable steps to implement the next big change with their program.

Living Together Peacefully at Camp: A Curriculum for Camping Success

Presenters:

- Rebekah Greene, Tattnall County 4-H Agent, University of Georgia Extension
- LeeAnna Deal, Southeast District 4-H PDC, University of Georgia Extension
- Lauren Dye, Elbert County 4-H Agent, University of Georgia Extension
- Sophie Walsky, Elbert County 4-H Program Assistant, University of Georgia Extension
- Georgia 4-H LTP@C Team

During this session, participants will explore the Living Together Peacefully at Camp curriculum, including the pre-camp orientations and during camp activities that reinforce principles of positive youth development. Session participants will engage in hands-on learning simulation of the curriculum lessons and will be provided with access to these curriculum resources for future use. Expected outcomes of this program include an increase in camper awareness of what to expect in residential camping situations and how to properly interact and respond to their fellow campers. Through the parent orientation process, parents will gain awareness of expectations, policies, and procedures. After implementation in Georgia in 2023, 74% of the counties who piloted this curriculum reported they saw an increase in positive behavior at camp. Eighty percent of those who saw improvement in behavior contributed this increase in positive behavior to teaching all or portions of Living Together Peacefully at Camp. This session is intended for any faculty/staff or volunteers that plan, implement, or supervise youth at residential 4-H camps.

Utilizing Technology to Overcome Language Barriers for Extension Programming

Presenter:

- Rebekah Greene, Tattnall County 4-H Agent, University of Georgia Extension

Despite the increasing percentage of Hispanic and Latino youth in the United States population, research has shown that low participation in youth development programs by these youth is a widespread concern (Borden et al., 2006; Guzman-Rocha, McLeod & Bohnert, 2017). In response to this unique challenge, Extension professionals in Southeast Georgia have worked together to leverage a combination of solutions to help increase accessibility of the 4-H program to Hispanic and Latino youth in 4th-12th grades. Their efforts have helped expand the reach of the program to Hispanic and Latino audiences, as well as retention of repeat participants in programs. During this conference session, the presenters will share about a variety of technology tools that can be utilized to help reach this underserved audience and make the overall Extension program more inclusive.

“Trees for Tomorrow Start Today”: A Research to Implementation Project

Presenters:

- Janet Hartin, Environmental Horticulture Advisor, Emeritus, University of California Cooperative Extension
- Margaret O'Neill, Master Gardener Program Supervisor, University of California Cooperative Extension

Ensuring that the research to end-user and end-user to research continuum functions effectively is a vital role of Cooperative Extension programs. An example of this continuum within the University of California Cooperative Extension is providing free shade trees identified in

UC/United States Forest Service research and information on their planting and care directly to residents of low-shade communities through the UCCE Master Gardener program. End-users targeted through the Trees for Tomorrow Start Today (TFTST) project specifically requested green solutions to help mitigate the extreme heat and high pollution burdens in their residential neighborhoods. Targeted end-users also experience high incidences of poverty and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, which are also reduced by tree planting efforts. In addition to reaching a historically underserved clientele, the TFTST project has successfully recruited Master Gardeners at TFTST tree education/tree giveaway events, adding to the diversity, equity, and inclusion elements within as well as through the project.

Aligning Findings from the 4-H Youth Retention Study with VRKC Lesson Plans

Presenters:

- Sarah Hensley, State Specialized Agent Curriculum and Evaluation, University of Florida, IFAS Extension Florida 4-H
- Alyssa Bowers, County Extension and Assistant Professor 4-H Youth Development, WSU King County Extension
- Candi Dierenfield, State Specialized Agent Volunteer Management and Development, UF IFAS Extension
- Meggan Franks, Manager of Reporting & Program Impact, LSU Ag Center
- Karen Henry, County Extension Agent 4-H Youth Development, UF IFAS Seminole County
- Sarah Torbert, State 4-H Volunteer Development Specialist, University of Wyoming Extension

4-H attracts youth and families for a variety of reasons, each with their own expectations. The experience during the first-year greatly influences families' and youths' intent to re-enroll for a second year. Given the increasing diversity of the US youth population, understanding differing expectations, needs, and values across all demographics is crucial for retaining diverse youth in 4-H programs.

This session will highlight the findings from four years of data collected by the multi-state youth retention study (YRS) team and how findings differ across race and ethnicity. This session will also present a framework that guides implementation of the Volunteer Research, Knowledge, Competency (VRKC) lesson plans to positively affect - retention of first year 4-H members.

Program participants will learn about the specific volunteer training lesson plans that align with the predictors of re-enrollment and learn how to implement these lesson-plans in their own volunteer development program. Participants will also leave with a plan for implementation in their own 4-H program.

Engaging Youth: Where they are – As They Are. PYD Through a Trauma-Informed Lens

Presenters:

- Sarah Hensley, State Specialized Agent Curriculum and Evaluation, University of Florida,
IFAS Extension Florida 4-H
- Brent Broadus, 4-H Regional Specialized Youth Development Faculty, UF IFAS Southwest Extension District
- Jessica Sprain, 4-H Extension Agent, UF IFAS Extension Osceola County

Given the high frequency of children who have endured Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) or other relational trauma 4-H professionals and volunteers must be knowledgeable of and able to develop programs through a trauma informed lens. Trust based relational intervention (TBRI) (Purvis, Cross, Dansereau, and Parris, 2013) informs the science of those working with youth who've experienced varying degrees of ACE's. Further, the Thriving model (Arnold, 2018) informs the fostering of a high-quality developmental context. Volunteers trained in trauma-informed PYD practices can promote an inclusive developmental context for youth and a space for young people to thrive and achieve positive developmental outcomes.

This session will increase knowledge and skills needed to engage youth; where they are and as they are. Participants will be better equipped to develop an inclusive program and aid in the prevention of undesirable behaviors. Interactive examples will teach easy to implement strategies that are proven to support youth exhibiting signs of dysregulation. This session can be easily replicated for training volunteers and presenters will share resources and tools for immediate use.

Walking Alongside A Volunteer's Unique Journey

Presenters:

- Christine Heverly, Extension Educator/Co-lead for MSU Extension Volunteer Management, Michigan State University
- Janelle Stewart, Extension Educator, Michigan State University
- Laurie Rivetto, Extension Educator, Michigan State University

In this session, we will explore a comprehensive volunteer system which incorporates both management and engagement components. This system not only focuses on the initial stages of bringing a new volunteer into an organization but also supports volunteers throughout their entire journey in their roles. This ensures volunteers not only start strong but continue to grow and contribute throughout their volunteer experience.

Our presentation will explore the stages of real volunteers' journeys: recruiting, screening, training/coaching, managing roles, and ultimately, transitioning them out effectively. Each

segment aims to equip volunteer managers with the insights necessary to support and build meaningful relationships with volunteers at every stage. Interactive elements such as PowerPoint presentations and reflection activities will be integrated to enhance learning and application. The session will conclude with insights and discussion on how these practices can be adapted across different states.

Join us to explore how effective volunteer management and engagement can transform the volunteer experience, making it more fulfilling and impactful for both volunteers and communities.

Wyoming Walks

Presenters:

- Joddee Jacobsen, Community Vitality and Health Educator, University of Wyoming Extension
- Hailey Sorg, Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality (WORTH) Initiative Extension Educator, University of Wyoming Extension
- Sara Olsen, Community Vitality and Health Educator, University of Wyoming

Wyoming Walks is the University of Wyoming Extension's program that promotes personal health and walking with a volunteer expert for learning, health, and wellness by offering a series of walks in unique locations. Learn about your town, county, and state to make new friends, and exercise in a whole new way and incorporate community volunteers to successfully expand programming and education.

Be More Active with the Opportunity to Walk with Friends... Old and New!

- Contribute to your overall wellbeing and health by experiencing fresh air, sights, and stories throughout the walk.
- Theme-based walks are led by a knowledgeable local expert(s)/volunteer(s) to acquaint the walkers with the legacy and wonders of their locale.
- Participants of this session will gain the knowledge and skills necessary to adopt this program within their community/county/state by using the potential, power, and knowledge of community volunteers in developing their own walking program.

Creating Powerful Partnerships

Presenters:

- Jenny Jordan, Navy 4-H Youth Program Specialist, North Carolina State University/Navy CYP
- Harriett Edwards, Professor & Extension Specialist, North Carolina State University

Working in Extension is working communities, and working in communities requires partnerships. Often in our work, we build networks to enhance our programs; within these

networks, we identify, recruit, engage, and retain volunteers. At the heart of our work is the partnerships we develop and maintain. Our session will take you on a journey through a thirty-year partnership that connects military-connected youth and families with the Extension 4-H program. Through exploring the 4-H Military Partnership that includes the Department of Defense, Army, Air Force, and Navy Headquarters along with USDA, Extension, and 4-H, participants will have an opportunity for discussion as we consider what makes a partnership successful and how you can create connections in your community that create mutually beneficial programs. We will look at the lessons learned through the partnership from navigating competing interests to speaking each other's language. Whether you're looking for a local collaboration, a statewide partnership, or to strengthen a connection, lessons learned in the 4-H Military Partnership can help build your powerful partnership.

Fostering Volunteer Communities of Practice

Presenters:

- Heather Kent, NW 4-H RSA, Agent IV, University of Florida
- Marie Arick, County Extension Director & 4-H Agent II, University of Florida
- Julie Dillard, District Director & Agent IV, University of Florida

In a recent study, 4-H volunteers described communities of practice in layman's terms as an effective means for learning (Kent, 2022). This result is like the findings of the eLearning Guild, who reported their members participate in communities of practice to support informal workplace learning (2014). Based on this research, organizations should provide opportunities for volunteers to discover communities of practice to support their roles via in-person and virtual means. This session will provide practical strategies county or state extension professionals can use to foster communities of practice for volunteers. These strategies have been implemented on a regional level in the panhandle of Florida and have resulted in increased levels of volunteer satisfaction and retention. After an overview of the research and implementation of our pilot, participants will have the opportunity to collaborate on a plan to incorporate more opportunities for volunteers to engage in communities of practice to support extension work.

Volunteer Management Essentials: A Micro-Credential for Beginners

Presenters:

- Jen Lobley, Extension Professor, Volunteer Development, University of Maine
- Kristen Brewer, Climate Corps Coordinator, Volunteer Maine
- Mari Glatter, Instructional Designer, University of Maine Cooperative Extension
- Sarah Harris, Online Learning Assistant, University of Maine Cooperative Extension
- Laura Wilson, Director of Non-Academic Learning Initiatives, University of Maine Cooperative Extension

Have you heard? Micro-credentials are all the rage! Micro-credentials are short, flexible learning opportunities that are designed for a particular skill set and provide an opportunity for individuals

to showcase important workplace skills and expertise to an employer. The key to micro-credentials is competencies! We know that poor volunteer management is associated with higher levels of staff turnover and decreased volunteer retention rates. University of Maine Cooperative Extension, in partnership with Volunteer Maine, launched a new online training for individuals getting started in a volunteer management role. Three self-paced courses make up the Introductory Volunteer Management micro-credential. Come to this workshop to engage in interactive conversations, learn about the process used to develop the micro-credential, hear how it is being utilized, and leave with a discount code to enroll in the course.

Volunteer Development with the "4-H Volunteer Educators' Guide"

Presenters:

- Gemma Miner, Volunteer Specialist, University of California 4-H Youth Development Program
- JoLynn Miller, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, University of California 4-H Youth Development Program
- Matthew Rodriguez, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, University of California 4-H Youth Development Program
- Nicole Marshall-Wheeler, 4-H Youth Development Advisor. University of California 4-H Youth Development Program

High quality, up-to-date volunteer development resources are essential for 4-H professionals. This session will introduce the “4-H Volunteer Educators’ Guide: For Volunteers Facilitating 4-H Educational Experiences” (further referred to as “The Guide”), its accompanying training materials (which include slideshows and training facilitation guides) and report the outcomes our team has had in training volunteers with these materials. The Guide covers 13 topics which 4-H volunteers should know ranging from the 4-H Thriving Model and Safety and Insurance to Experiential Learning. Within each topic, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is highlighted.

Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Volunteers to Localize Your eLearning Experiences

Presenter:

- Scott Mautte, Community Education Specialist III: 4-H Volunteer and Staff Development, University of California

Unlock the potential of your volunteer base by learning innovative strategies to recruit and engage culturally and linguistically diverse volunteers! This workshop will guide Volunteer Managers through the process of training localization, from organizational readiness to discovering practical steps for recruiting an effective volunteer eLearning review team, fostering inclusive practices, and ensuring your eLearning materials resonate with all learners.

Join our dynamic workshop to create inclusive, impactful eLearning experiences! You'll engage in hands-on activities to understand language challenges, master localization techniques, and learn strategies for building an effective eLearning Localization Team. Benefit from interactive presentations, live demonstrations, and inspiring volunteer testimonials. Leave with a comprehensive toolkit and actionable insights to enhance your recruitment and engagement strategies.

Enhancing Community Impact through Integrated Volunteer Programs: A Focus on Collaboration, Engagement, and Sustainability

Presenters:

- Margaret O'Neill, Master Gardener Coordinator /Environmental Education Supervisor University of California Cooperative Extension San Bernardino County
- Christine Davidson, EFNEP Program Supervisor, University of California Cooperative Extension San Bernardino County
- Denneigh Denton, Master Food Preserver Coordinator, University of California Cooperative Extension San Bernardino County

Explore successful cross-program collaboration, culturally responsive engagement, and effective outreach with limited resources. Using practical examples, attendees will learn how to integrate diverse volunteer programs including Master Food Preserver, Master Gardener, and nutrition into cohesive community-driven efforts.

Participants gain insights into strategies like leveraging strengths to create synergistic community impacts. Create cultural connections by engaging with diverse communities, including the utilization of Spanish materials and speakers to enhance inclusivity. Finally, effective outreach despite resource constraints, utilizing workshops and kits to empower volunteers and communities.

This is crucial for enhancing community resilience and inclusivity by building stronger collaborations, strengthening relationships between volunteer programs to amplify community outreach. Promoting cultural understanding with fostering an environment where all community members feel valued and included in volunteer initiatives. Attendees will be equipped with actionable strategies to foster collaborative, culturally responsive, and efficient volunteer engagement models.

Twenty Year Celebration - Culture and Content of Annual Volunteer Training

Presenters:

- Carrie Ann Olson, Extension Educator and Associate Extension Professor, University of Minnesota Extension

- Karyn Santl, Extension Educator, Youth Development, University of Minnesota Extension
- Abby Wagner, Extension Educator, Youth Development, University of Minnesota Extension

For two decades, Minnesota 4-H has provided annual training to volunteers, youth, and community members, aiming to enhance the 4-H program's quality through timely and relevant youth worker training and developmental experiences. Each year, the training centers on a specific topic to promote volunteer success and address statewide priorities. Utilizing a train-the-trainer model, staff facilitators are oriented to peer-reviewed resources, promotional packages, and curriculum materials. This model has evolved to incorporate diverse delivery strategies, catering to the varying capacities of staff and designed to meet local volunteer needs.

This workshop will showcase our development and dissemination model, its evolution over the years, and its value to staff and volunteers. Participants will explore a variety of resources and gain access to our guiding principles, material evaluation rubric, and annual topic packages. Twenty years of annual statewide volunteer training demonstrate our commitment to supporting volunteers, forming a crucial part of broader, yearly training and support plans for 4-H volunteers within counties and regions.

Integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Volunteer Screening Practices

Presenters:

- Kristy Oosterhouse, Extension Educator, Michigan State University Extension
- Christine Heverly, Extension Educator, Michigan State University Extension

In this session, we will discuss considerations for volunteer screening using a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens. Extension professionals will learn how to incorporate their university's shared values and non-discrimination statements into their volunteer screening practices. The session will help participants utilize all their screening components, considering the capacity a person wants to volunteer in and the community context, to inform the DEI lens applied to each applicant. Participants will explore and develop volunteer interview questions related to DEI and practice implementing these strategies through interactive exercises and discussions. This session will empower Extension professionals who manage volunteers to create inclusive and equitable screening processes, enhancing their ability to foster a diverse volunteer community.

Navigating Stakeholder Shifting Focus Friction to Support LGBTQIA+ Participants

Presenters:

- Joseph Rand, Extension Professor, University of Minnesota - Extension, 4-H

- Alison White, 4-H Regional Extension Specialist, University of Washington
- Jeremy Elliot-Engel, Associate Dean and Associate Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Hawaii

In this session, participants will gain perspective and practice on research-based strategies that support Extension personnel in navigating pushback and preparing stakeholders for requisite change in order to provide safe, inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ participants. In order to support Extension professionals in effectively and confidently creating environments that promote positive outcomes for LGBTQ+ participants, this session will provide participants with scaffolded opportunities to apply research-based strategies to relevant Extension program examples. Participants will gain new perspectives, tools, and talking points to navigate stakeholder SFF and improve the capacity of their program to support belonging and positive health outcomes for LGBTQ+ participants.

Polar Bear Tactics in Volunteer Management – Connecting Polar Opposite Personalities Without the Bear Fights

Presenters:

- Sarah Rautio, MSU Extension Master Gardener State Leader, , Michigan State University Extension
- Melissa Jacobsen, MSU Extension Master Gardener Program Assistant, Michigan State University Extension

When working on projects, Extension staff and volunteers often gravitate towards others who think and act similarly. There is also a trend to work on large work teams for diverse input and more helping hands. Personality tests identify diverse personalities yet techniques to connect with each other following the tests are lacking. Here we present an innovative technique for managing our work and volunteers. We hypothesize that “pairings” of certain personality types (especially polar opposites), in combination with methods to stay positive and connected, produce highly effective working relationships, both professionally and across volunteers. With some effort and a bit of luck, Dr. Sarah Rautio and Melissa Jacobsen of the Michigan State University Extension Master Gardener Program® fell into this situation. From their leader-assistant experience, they present a novel new idea on how to apply their newly named “Polar Bear Opposite” technique when pairing staff and volunteers. Through audience interaction, they share experiences and ideas on how to apply polar opposite pairings without the bear fights.

Value-Added Volunteering: The Impact of Master Food Preserver Training and Volunteering on Workforce Skills

Presenters:

- Kathy Savoie, Extension Professor. University of Maine Cooperative Extension

- Kate McCarty, Food Systems Professional, University of Maine Cooperative Extension

University of Maine reaps the benefits of over 50,000 hours of volunteer time to support our community-based programs each year. But what do the volunteers gain from their content training and volunteer experience? Join us to learn directly from a panel of actively engaged UMaine Master Food Preserver Volunteers about how their home food preservation training and volunteering has created value-added workforce skills to enrich and enhance their lives. Master Food Preserver Volunteers have transferred skills gained through the Master Food Preserver Volunteer Program to author books, develop home-based businesses, expand youth workforce readiness, and inspire socially disadvantaged farmers to seek institutional level food processing. This panel discussion will highlight the types of knowledge and skills gained and the extent to which these skills were transferred within the workforce.

Teens as Teachers and Change Agents: Young Volunteers Address Plastics Issues and Environmental Sustainability

Presenters:

- Anne Stevenson, Extension Educator and Professor, University of Minnesota Extension Department of Youth Development
- Heidi Wyatt, Program Associate, University of Minnesota Extension Department of Youth Development
- Amie Mondl, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Extension Department of Youth Development
- Samantha Hamm, Youth Teen Teacher, University of Minnesota Extension
- William Archambault, Youth Teen Teacher, University of Minnesota Extension

4-H recognizes that young people are innovators and play a critical role as positive change agents in developing solutions to address the urgent environmental challenge of plastic. Young people ages 12-19 are a unique volunteer niche and an often untapped resource of volunteer change-makers.

You will learn about the program models and learning opportunities we have developed to equip teens as teachers to help turn passion into action for the planet, and the five levels of national, research-based curriculum we have authored for youth in grades K-12.

We will use lecture, hands-on learning, video, and curriculum, sharing program models we have co-created with teens which offer the opportunity to teach younger youth. Participants will leave with all the curriculum resources to support youth engagement in learning about and addressing the issues surrounding our relationship with plastics. (free download: 4hpolymers.org). They will have models which can be replicated and adapted in a variety of settings with a wide range of audiences, access to our google site, support for implementation, and will understand options for further professional development on the topic and resources.

Interrupting Bias: Speaking Up When Speaking Up Is Hard

Presenters:

- Alisha Targonski, Extension DEI Coordinator and 4-H Professional, University of Maine Cooperative Extension
- Tara Marble, 4-H Professional, University of Maine Cooperative Extension

Confrontation is inherently tricky, and for some, something to avoid entirely, but what happens when doing nothing is actually creating more harm? This presentation centers on knowing and understanding the foundational rights that all participants of our programs, as well as within our workplaces, to be spaces that are welcoming and free from discriminatory behavior. How often do our volunteers and staff understand their non-discrimination rights and responsibilities? Let's dig into the fine print, and how it informs our behavioral expectations and environments of Extension programs. Participants will work together to explore terminology and then dialogue together through two approaches of interrupting biased behavior, to give people the tools to make these teachable moments and to call someone 'in' rather than call someone 'out.'

Updating Volunteer Materials to Improve Program Outcomes and Enhancing Accessibility

Presenters:

- Ryan Tesar, 4-H Volunteer Program Coordinator, University of Nevada, Reno Extension

For many years, the 4-H and Master Gardener programs at the University of Nevada, Reno Extension operated with their own volunteer intake procedures, training requirements, and overall approach to volunteer management. Training materials were outdated, staff was unaware of the volunteer intake process, and accessing our materials was not easy for many volunteers. To rectify this issue, we revised our volunteer recruitment and training documents from the ground up, and then began the process of making them more accessible by procuring an online tool that would allow for volunteers to access our materials at their convenience and in a language of their choosing.

This presentation explores our revision process and looks at the ways we adapted our materials for online and in-person training. We will also discuss strategies for training Extension staff across the state to create a uniform and effective volunteer intake process. We will look at volunteer program outcomes and how the revised materials impacted staff's ability to recruit, train, and retain volunteers. Through an interactive workshop, we will collaboratively discuss ways to revise your own volunteer process and materials.

Embracing Conflict as a Learning Tool for Quality Programming

Presenters:

- Dan Teuteberg, Associate Professor/Regional 4-H Specialist, Washington State University Extension
- Jana Ferris, Associate Professor/Volunteer Development Specialist, Washington State University Extension

Embracing conflict doesn't usually come easily to most people! This session will highlight a shift taken by WSU Extension from conflict management to an educational/collaborative approach. Participants will gain an understanding of the effectiveness of a collaborative volunteer environment in reducing volunteer conflict and, through small and large group work and discussion, review several scenarios as examples. Participants will learn how to use conflict data to inform program revisions.

Mastering Conflict Management: Empowering Staff to Manage Conflict Among Volunteers

Presenters:

- Abby Wagner, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development
- Karyn Santl, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development

Volunteers play a critical role in the success of many organizations. However, managing volunteer teams can often lead to conflicts that, if not effectively handled, can undermine the program's goals and harm organizational culture. Unmanaged conflict can have far-reaching impacts on an organization, including reduced volunteer engagement, lower morale, and decreased productivity. This session will emphasize the importance of timely and effective conflict management to maintain a positive organizational culture. Participants will learn the importance of active listening, listening to learn, and how to provide constructive feedback respectfully while maintaining authority. The session will include practical application through role-playing scenarios to solidify the concepts and techniques discussed throughout the workshop. These exercises will allow participants to practice conflict resolution techniques and gain confidence in handling real-life conflict situations.

Join us to enhance your conflict management skills and learn how to create a supportive volunteer community.

From Toxicity to Transformation: Creating Healthy Volunteer Ecosystems

Presenter:

- [Martin J. Cowling, Keynote Speaker](#)

Toxicity in organizations can undermine volunteer well-being, disrupt engagement, and cause frustration for leaders. This session explores the signs of toxic environments in volunteer-led organizations and discusses how to transform them into thriving, positive ecosystems.

Through practical insights and real-world examples, Martin J. Cowling guides participants in understanding how to create healthier environments where volunteers feel valued and motivated.

Building a Leadership Academy to Equip Volunteer Leaders

Presenters:

- Sally Mineer, FCS Extension Specialist for Professional Development, University of Kentucky
- Kelly May, Senior Extension Associate for Family Finance & Resource Mgt., University of Kentucky

Kentucky Extension Specialists will share about a novel and successful program in Kentucky to train volunteers for leadership roles within a statewide organization. To create a sustainable network of future leaders, KEHA has designed the Leadership Academy to provide training and build confidence to select nominees. So far Kentucky has hosted two in-person Leadership Academies with remarkable success, including a "payback" requirement of completing 40 hours of service in leadership after the training. Learn about this program, how it started, what it included, how it has succeeded, and how your program could model something similar!

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From Numbers to Narrative: Measuring, Maximizing, and Celebrating Volunteer Impact

Presenter:

- Martin J. Cowling, Keynote Speaker

When it comes to recruiting and retaining volunteers, demonstrating the contribution people can make to your cause is vital. In fact, having a good understanding of the contribution of volunteering to your organization is essential if we want to secure funding, influence effectively and so much more. In this session we'll explore the development of methods for measuring the contribution volunteers make to an organization and society, how those methods work, their pros and cons, why you should measure volunteering and how to use the data you produce.

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