



## Understanding Volunteer Management in 4-H<sup>1</sup>

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### Overview

A key responsibility for 4-H agents has been to engage volunteers and expand their involvement in 4-H programs (Schmiesing & Safrit 2007). There are a number of functions that a 4-H agent must accomplish to successfully involve volunteers in his or her county program. This article will provide an overview of these functions including: an historical perspective of volunteer involvement in the Florida Cooperative Extension Service; the role of the 4-H agent as an administrator of volunteers; risk management; and, a process for managing volunteers.

### Extension Volunteers

Volunteers are an essential component of Extension programs and provide nonformal education to clientele who otherwise might not be served (Boyd, 2004). They are vital to Extension programming and are key components in accomplishing local, state, and national initiatives (Sinasky & Bruce 2007). Volunteers contribute to learning environments by carrying out many roles and fill positions that both directly and indirectly impact Extension's clientele (Boyce, 1971). Volunteers have historically been involved in

UF/IFAS Extension in three primary functions. First, all Extension programs are required to have a program advisory committee. A portion of a county faculty member's annual appraisal has been related to advisory committee involvement. Program advisory committees provide benefits to Extension programs, such as:

- Engaging a broad spectrum of citizens' experiences and perspectives;
- Ensuring a program's relevance to the community;
- Developing indigenous leadership;
- Creating widespread public awareness of the program; and
- Allowing diverse input about evaluation and accountability (Banach, Zunz & LaPointe, 2006; Cole & Cole, 1983).

Next, a common program function of volunteers is education delivery. A good example outside of 4-H is the work of Master Gardeners. In county Extension offices across Florida, volunteers answer questions for residents related to homeowner gardening using

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research-based information. In addition, many of these volunteers help county faculty train other Master Gardener volunteers in the program. Each year in 4-H, more than 15,000 volunteers support the 4-H program in Florida by providing learning opportunities for youth in community clubs, classrooms, residential camps and other events and activities.

Finally, volunteers serve in Extension program support functions. This could include the following:

- Fundraising
- Marketing the program including writing articles in newspapers, preparing newsletters, and speaking to industry groups and other organizations
- Coordinating and managing events and opportunities for clientele
- Recruiting new volunteers to become involved in Extension

The only factors limiting volunteer involvement in program support roles are the ability to identify a role that needs a volunteer and creating a compelling reason for a volunteer to fulfill the role.

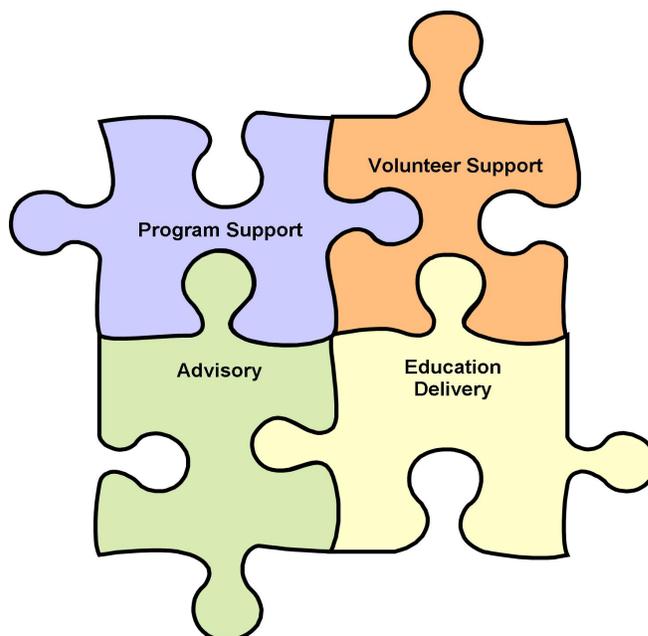
### Extension Agent Role as Administrator or Volunteers

One way of looking at the roles of a manager of volunteers is through the use of geometric figures (McCurley and Lynch, 2006). These figures represent what and how the interacting processes of volunteer management work. Let's take a closer look at how a puzzle square, overlapping circles, and a triangle help to understand the role in volunteer management.

#### The Puzzle

One way to think about volunteer management within county 4-H programs is through a puzzle. The square represents the overall goals and objectives of the 4-H program. The puzzle pieces represent the various educational activities and program tasks that need to be completed to achieve the goals and objectives. As the 4-H agent, the goal is to design and

shape these individual pieces in concert with both the staff and volunteers.



**Figure 1.** Volunteer opportunities may include program support, volunteer support, education delivery, or service in an advisory capacity.

#### The Overlapping Circles

Another key aspect of involving volunteers can be illustrated using overlapping circles. One circle represents the needs of the 4-H program. Ask these questions:

- What educational delivery methods and program support initiatives of the 4-H program are not getting done that need to be accomplished?
- What other activities, projects or initiatives are not imperative, but would enhance the quality of the 4-H program?
- What are some things that need to be done, but no one has the skills to do?
- What are some things that resources are not available to pay someone to do?

The answers to these questions can form the basis for defining volunteer roles that can be integrated into the 4-H program. The keys are to:

- bring in volunteers to compliment staff in delivering education or providing program support that adds value to 4-H,
- and empower volunteers to take on projects which address unmet community needs.

By doing this, the effectiveness of Extension programs is extended and facilitates a positive relationship between staff and volunteers.

The other circle represents what volunteers are willing and able to do. What volunteers are willing to do is related to their motivations. The development of the Volunteer Motivation Inventory (VMI) describes ten key categories of volunteer motivation based upon research of more than 2,400 volunteers from 15 different nonprofit organizations (Esmond & Dunlop 2004). These categories are:

1. Values – Describes the situation where a volunteer is motivated by the prospect of being able to act on firmly held beliefs that it is important for one to help others.
2. Recognition – Describes a situation where a volunteer enjoys the recognition that volunteering gives them. They enjoy their skills and contributions being recognized, and this is what motivates them to volunteer.
3. Social Interaction – Describes a situation where a volunteer particularly enjoys the social atmosphere of volunteering. They enjoy the opportunity to build social networks and interact with other people.
4. Reciprocity – Describes a situation where a volunteer enjoys volunteering and views it as a very equal exchange. The volunteer has a strong understanding of the 'higher good'.
5. Reactivity – Describes a situation where a volunteer is volunteering out of a need to heal or address their own past issues.
6. Self-Esteem – Describes a situation where a volunteer seeks to improve their own self esteem or feelings of self-worth through their volunteering.
7. Social – Describes a situation where a volunteer seeks to conform to normative influences of significant others (e.g. friends or family).
8. Career Development – Describes a situation where a volunteer is motivated to volunteer by the prospect of gaining experience and skills in the field that may eventually be beneficial in assisting them to find employment.
9. Understanding – Describes a situation where a volunteer is particularly interested in improving their understanding of themselves, or the people they are assisting and/or the organization for which they are a volunteer.
10. Protective – Describes a situation where a volunteer is volunteering as a means of escaping negative feelings about themselves.

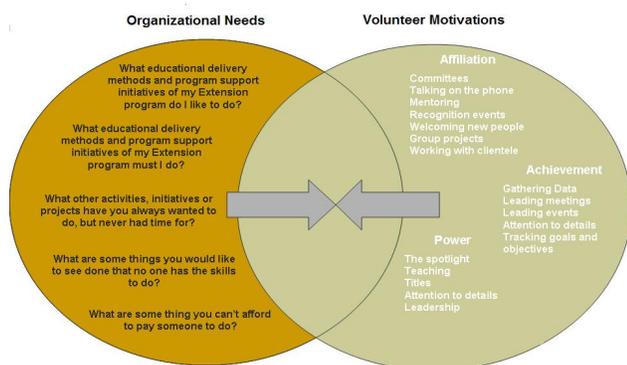
Although comprehensive, these categories can be classified as affiliation, achievement, and/or power (McClelland, 1987).

The Power motive causes a person to desire control or influence over another person or group. People motivated by power do things in order to draw attention to themselves. Volunteers motivated by power may satisfy this need through leadership roles.

Another major motive is the Affiliation motive. An individual with an affiliation motive will act in order to enjoy mutual friendship. Affiliation motivation is defined as establishing, restoring or maintaining a close, warm, friendly relationship with another or others, or being emotionally concerned over separation from someone else (McCurley and Lynch, 2006). Volunteers with a high affiliation spend more of their time interacting with others than do people with weaker affiliation motives. Mentoring and group projects are excellent roles for volunteers with affiliation motivations.

Volunteers with Achievement motives will act in ways that will help them to outperform someone else, meet or surpass some standard of excellence, or do something unique. Definitions of what constitutes achievement differ, but what is constant across these achievers is the notion of doing something better. Volunteers, as achievers, prefer working on

moderately difficult tasks and are drawn to work in situations where they take personal responsibility for their performance. Such work might include coordinating and managing events, gathering data, or leading meetings.



**Figure 2.** Matching program needs and volunteer roles requires evaluation of potential volunteer interests, skills, and abilities as well as maintenance of a plan for volunteer involvement.

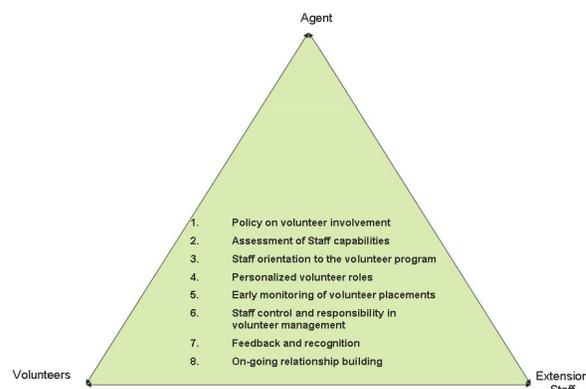
Another aspect of this illustration is that a volunteer must be capable of doing or learning to do their assigned role. A key to sustaining a volunteer program is the ability to match the interests, skills and abilities of a potential volunteer with an appropriate role in the Extension program. This is represented where the two circles overlap.

### The Triangle

Today's volunteers are highly integrated into Extension. In fact, volunteers often fill roles that have previously been performed by paid staff. Many times volunteers will work more closely with staff than with the 4-H agent. This dynamic requires that the volunteer administrator be linked to both volunteers and the staff. A key role is ensuring that the needs and concerns of staff working with volunteers are addressed, while at the same time empowering volunteers into expanded roles within Extension.

This can be accomplished by communicating the following to all members of the 4-H program:

1. Policy on volunteer involvement.



**Figure 3.** Dynamics of effective volunteer program management

2. Assessment of staff capabilities.
3. Staff orientation to the volunteer program.
4. Personalized volunteer roles.
5. Early monitoring of volunteer placements.
6. Staff control and responsibility in volunteer management.
7. Feedback and recognition.
8. On-going relationship building.

### Risk Management

An important consideration in working with volunteers is reducing risk first and foremost to clientele, but also to volunteers, faculty, staff and UF/IFAS. There are a number of policies, procedures, and regulations that have been established to protect volunteers and the organization.

#### General

The University of Florida provides the following definition (6CI-3.0031 (1b):

*A volunteer is any person who, of his or her own free will, provides services to the University with no monetary compensation, on a continuous, occasional, or one-time basis.*

Volunteers must be at least 14 years old. All volunteers, including youth volunteers, must complete a volunteer application. For youth, this

application must be signed by their parent or guardian (6C1-3.0031 (3a)).

### Youth Protection and Volunteer Screening

To protect youth involved in Extension programs, the University of Florida has established a volunteer screening policy. UF/IFAS policy applies this policy to any volunteer working with youth three or more times annually or those chaperoning youth to overnight activities and events. University regulation 6C1-3.0031 (3a) states:

*Each person wishing to become a volunteer shall furnish to the appropriate department/operational unit such personal and professional information as may be necessary for the determination of his or her suitability as a volunteer. The department/operational unit seeking volunteer services shall be responsible for the screening and selection of volunteers.*

This policy is designed for protecting:

1. Youth participants by implementing risk management practices.
2. Volunteers by establishing and communicating policies that reduce risk in specific situations.
3. University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service faculty and staff by establishing consistent guidelines for structure and behavior.

At a minimum, the following steps will ensure an effective screening process:

1. Volunteer submits application.
2. Volunteer signs Adult Agreement.
3. Extension obtains copy of applicants driver's license
4. Extension conducts background check (Levels I, II and III).
5. Extension checks three references.
6. Extension conducts interview with applicant.

### Other Responsibilities

Finally, the University of Florida has established the following policies:

1. Each department/operational unit shall record the number, location and duties of volunteers, and the total number of annual hours of volunteer service provided to the unit.
2. Volunteers shall be advised that they are entitled to workers' compensation and state liability protection under the same conditions as state employees.
3. Upon selection, the department/operational unit shall assign each volunteer specific tasks or duties and provide adequate training.
4. Volunteer services may cease, at any time, at the request of the volunteer or at the discretion of the University.

In addition to state regulations, the University of Florida (6C1-3.0031 Administrative Affairs: Volunteers) outlines the responsibilities related to volunteers. These include:

- Purpose and definition
- Responsibilities of Colleges, Schools and Divisions
- Screening, Acceptance and Benefits
- Training, Utilization and Supervision
- Responsibilities of Volunteers – Termination

For more information related to State of Florida volunteerism, refer to the following state statutes related to volunteerism:

- 110.501 State definitions of volunteers
- 110.502 Scope of act; status of volunteers
- 110.503 Responsibilities of state agencies
- 110.504 Volunteer benefits
- 768.135 Florida Volunteer Protection Act

- 768.28 State Liability Protection

## A Process for Managing Volunteers

From a human resource management perspective, it is clear volunteers are unpaid members of the Extension office. However, if given \$100,000 with the requirement that it be spent on new employees, one might:

1. Assess the needs of the Extension program and pinpoint where new employees would be most useful;
2. Develop job descriptions, including the required qualifications;
3. Advertise the job openings;
4. Interview and screen applicants, with the expectation that some candidates will not qualify for a specific job;
5. Select the people by matching them to the available job openings;
6. Orient these new employees to the policies and procedures of Extension;
7. Train these new employees in the specifics of the job;
8. Find them office space;
9. Allow them to perform their assigned roles;
10. Recognize volunteers for their accomplishments;
11. Evaluate their progress and the accomplishments of the initiatives with which they were involved.

Volunteers fulfill many of the same roles and functions as paid staff and as such, these guidelines should be followed when involving volunteers. When administering and managing unpaid staff, utilize approaches designed to engage and empower volunteers. ISTOURES is a nationally recognized leadership model for volunteers that encompass the same concepts that would be used to hire new employees. This systematic approach to volunteer administration should:

- **I**dentify how volunteers will be involved in the Extension program;
- **S**elect the most appropriate volunteer for a volunteer role through effective recruiting strategies and screening;
- **O**rient volunteers about Extension and their specific duties;
- **T**rain volunteers and staff to increase their capacity;
- **U**tilize volunteers through empowerment;
- **R**ecognize volunteers for their contributions;
- **E**valuate volunteers by focusing on results
- **S**ustain the momentum of volunteer involvement (Boyce, 1971).

It has often been said that there is no such thing as a free lunch. This is also the case with volunteers. They are not free. In addition to the financial commitment that is often made to volunteer programs, involving volunteers requires a huge investment in time and energy. In addition, the costs associated with the inability to retain volunteers are high. A 2009 study showed these costs to be ~\$1,200 per volunteer lost (Esiner, Grimm, Maynard and Washburn, 2009).

### Where to Start

Do not expect to accomplish everything at once, so don't try. Begin by getting to know the status of the existing 4-H program. Use the following guide to assess the current situation and identify volunteer program needs:

1. Consult with the County Extension Director (CED) for their input related to the extent of the 4-H volunteer program.
2. Working with the Regional Specialized 4-H Agent (RSA), request and review all data related to the county 4-H volunteer program including a) existing volunteers and roles, and b) county demographics

3. Together with the CED and RSA, identify key stakeholders, county youth leaders, community leaders and advisory council members.
4. Request a copy of any previous needs assessments conducted on behalf of the 4-H program.
5. Consult with the 4-H Advisory Committee, key stakeholders and community leaders for their input related to the 4-H volunteer program.

## Conclusion

Expanding volunteer involvement can be an effective strategy in meeting the goals and objectives of an Extension program. To do so, understand the role in administering and managing volunteers. Use the three geometric figures to help understand the 4-H agent's role as a volunteer administrator. Be aware that there are a number of policies and procedures for working with volunteers. Utilize the ISOTURE model. It is a well established strategy to expand volunteer involvement in Extension programs. Understanding the role of a volunteer administrator, knowing and following UF/IFAS volunteer policies and procedures and utilizing management approaches designed for volunteers will increase the net benefits of volunteer involvement in an Extension program as well as increase the satisfaction of your volunteers.

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