

4-H paraprofessionals defining their tasks

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Reviewing and Redefining Roles

Are you interested in improving the effectiveness of your county's youth program team, perhaps by adding new paraprofessionals? One way to become more effective in using staff is through an ongoing process of review and redefinition of roles. This process requires the attention of 4-H youth professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers.

All three types of youth workers need training to reach consensus on tasks to be performed by any of them. The ideal role model developed by Kiesow identifies appropriate tasks for paraprofessionals.¹ He found professionals and volunteers could agree on tasks appropriate for paraprofessionals, but the volunteers were more willing to accept certain tasks as being more appropriate for paraprofessionals. Using Kiesow's role model, a research project in North Carolina verified that the tasks in the model could be performed successfully by paraprofessionals and were acceptable to professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers in a county situation.²

Tasks for members of the youth team must be adapted to the local situation and the individual paraprofessionals involved. Successful use of youth paraprofessionals is directly related to how well the professionals accept new supervisory and planning roles.³

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One way to avoid conflict and duplication is to involve professionals and paraprofessionals in developing their own job descriptions.⁴ Results of a recent study in Kansas and

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Missouri indicate that Extension professionals think their own 4-H tasks and relationships need to be redefined when paraprofessionals join the team.⁵

NOAH Process

We have a process to help you with role definition for youth staff members. It's based on the Need Overlap Analysis in the Helping Process (NOAH II), developed by the National Information Center on Volunteerism.⁶ We've adapted the process for use with professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers in the Extension 4-H youth program.

NOAH is based on the need to identify where the responsibilities of team members overlap. This process permits you to focus on one position and define responsibilities for the individuals in that position. In this instance, we're focusing on 4-H paraprofessionals' jobs and how professionals and volunteers interact with them. In this process, the professionals first identify tasks they're willing to give up. Paraprofessionals identify the tasks they can do. Volunteers suggest other tasks representing unmet needs. The overlap between these sets of tasks is where the job of the paraprofessional evolves. Figure 1 shows how the process works.

This process can enhance program management by:

1. Helping professionals give up some tasks to make time for new, creative ones.

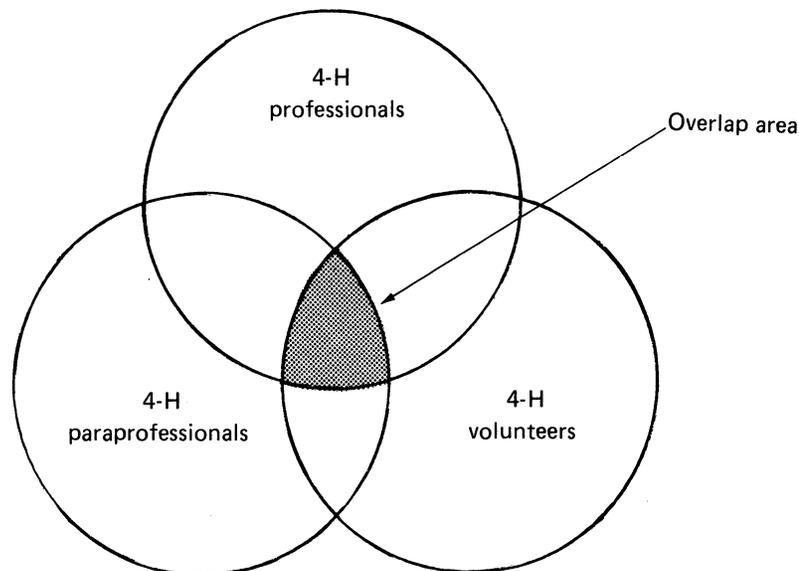


Figure 1. Process to define paraprofessional's job.

2. Identifying specific tasks for paraprofessionals that are accepted by all three position groups.
3. Increasing the understanding of the responsibilities to be done.
4. Providing a setting for genuine communication between team members.

**PHASE I:
Planning and
Pre-negotiation**

*Step 1:
Professionals
Identify Tasks*

As a professional, your first assignment is to analyze your own job and to break it into specific tasks. Prepare a list of 4-H tasks you do throughout the year. Next, prepare a list of dreams—things you'd like to do and don't because you don't have the time. Keep in mind that you're trying to make your job more satisfying and your work more effective.

Now review both lists. Put an asterisk next to tasks that paraprofessionals could do, tasks you do because there's no one else, and tasks you'd prefer not doing. Put a "v" by the tasks that could be done by volunteers. You'll need to explore ways to enlist volunteers to do these tasks.

This step identifies your present 4-H youth responsibilities and those you're willing to assign to either volunteers or paraprofessionals. Two variations in this step are:

- a. Doing it in a group setting if group work doesn't suppress any individual's input. When staff from more than one unit are working together, lists must be developed for each unit.
- b. Including office assistants (secretaries) in the process if they have assigned or assumed responsibilities that have significant impact on the program.

*Step 2:
Paraprofessionals
Identify Tasks*

Ask the paraprofessionals to prepare a list of things they believe they can do for the program. Ideally, a professional, serving as a facilitator, would meet with the paraprofessionals to help them identify these tasks and explore their interests and abilities. This step can help paraprofessionals understand purposes and goals of the 4-H youth program and the role of volunteers.

The list of paraprofessionals' tasks should meet the following criteria:

- a. *Realistic*: things they have done before or things they know they can do.
- b. *Creative*: tasks they will find challenging. This gives them an opportunity to work on dream ideas.
- c. *Relevant to the program*: a job that should be a part of the 4-H program.

*Step 3:
Volunteers
Identify Program
Needs*

To get input from volunteers, a committee of 8 to 10 members should be formed. This group could include community club leaders; local and county project leaders; junior or teen leaders; and committee, board, or council members. An existing planning committee could be used. You might use three representatives of each of the following groups: teen leaders, project/community leaders, and the county 4-H youth policy-making group. If the *Affirmative Action Expansion and Review Committee* is active in the county, representation from it would also be helpful.

The volunteer committee, with a professional serving as facilitator, should develop a list of the county's unmet needs in relation to Extension youth programs. The facilitator can stimulate thinking about unreached clientele, problems needing attention, youth needs in the community, weaknesses in volunteer training, and other concerns. These ideas represent the volunteers' input into the development of the paraprofessional's job description. As tasks that could be performed by volunteers are suggested, they should be placed on a separate list for discussion with volunteers.

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**PHASE II:
Negotiation**

*Step 1:
Professionals
Present Tasks*

In Phase II, each of the groups shares its ideas about the paraprofessionals' responsibilities. The professionals have identified some tasks they'd like to give up, if paraprofessionals can take on some of those tasks.

The best way to find out whether paraprofessionals can help professionals find time for their "dream list" is to ask them. At this point, you're ready for the professionals and paraprofessionals to interact. A setting where honest feelings can be communicated without fear of reprisal is most important.

Begin the negotiation process by having a professional share one task or dream he/she is willing to give up to paraprofessionals. Expect that the discussion might be slow. But, once the ice is broken, you should have a lively, interesting discussion as other professionals suggest tasks. After the professionals suggest a task, the paraprofessionals respond in one of three ways:

- a. Unconditional "yes": "I can do that because I have experience doing it" or "I am interested in learning to do it."
- b. Unconditional "no": "I don't think it should be part of my job" or "I don't feel capable of doing it."
- c. Conditional "maybe": "I'm not sure about it." This may be the major response, but the process of negotiation can then begin from which the paraprofessional's job description can evolve in an atmosphere of give-and-take.

At first, the professionals may tend to suggest jobs for the paraprofessionals that are more mundane than dream items but avoid identifying any tasks as mundane. Remember that what's mundane for a professional isn't necessarily so for a paraprofessional. As trust builds, more challenging job suggestions will develop and the overlap area should widen.

As each task is discussed, record it on the "yes," "no," or "maybe" list. The resulting "yes" and "maybe" lists will be used in the negotiation of paraprofessional job descriptions in Phase III.

*Step 2:
Paraprofessionals
Present Tasks*

We have you, the professional, make suggestions in Step 1 because we think it's important for you to have the first input. After professionals have presented their ideas, they're surprisingly receptive to job ideas paraprofessionals suggest. When the paraprofessionals present their ideas, you have a chance to really test them. Again, these tasks should be listed for further negotiation.

You can easily arrive at 20 to 25 tasks in these steps, but 3 to 5 are enough to be successful. Steps 1 and 2 have important side benefits of clarifying roles, developing respect between professionals and paraprofessionals, and establishing direct communication. In addition, the process can be a gauge of professionals' receptivity to paraprofessionals.

*Step 3:
Volunteers
React*

At this point the volunteer committee is brought into the negotiation process. A smaller group of three or four individuals could represent the larger volunteer group. The volunteer committee is asked to evaluate the job ideas on the professionals' and paraprofessionals' "yes" and "maybe" lists assigning them to one of the following categories:

- a. Coincides with primary unmet needs: tasks reflect consensus of all three groups.
- b. Indifferent to primary unfilled needs: tasks usually serve organizational needs rather than youth needs.

- c. In conflict with volunteers' unmet needs: tasks should be renegotiated to optimize consensus.

Remember, tasks shouldn't be rejected because they aren't directed at the majority of the youth. There may be some areas in which unfilled needs are totally missed that the volunteers feel are important. These tasks should be fed into Phase III.

PHASE III: Refinement and Consensus

Now it's time to bring the groups together for final discussion of the results of Phases I and II. No matter how this phase is handled, hard negotiation may be needed to determine the final paraprofessional task assignments.

Once tasks for the paraprofessional are identified from the overlap area, they should be formalized into a job description for the paraprofessionals in the county. As the paraprofessionals gain experience and some of the initial needs are met, the process should be repeated and further revisions of the job description implemented. This process also can be focused on professionals or volunteers to identify specific responsibilities for those positions.

Summary

By using this process, we believe you'll be able to improve the effectiveness of your paraprofessionals. Undoubtedly, you'll find your effectiveness improved, too. Together, you and the paraprofessional will be building a strong 4-H staff team.

Footnotes

1. John A. Kiesow, "Role Model for the Paraprofessional Youth Worker in the Extension Service" (Ed.D. dissertation, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, 1972), pp. 105-07, 110-11 and Jerry Parsons and John Kiesow, "The 4-H Program Assistant's Role," *Journal of Extension*, XIII (July/August, 1975), 11-18.
2. Charles E. Lewis, John A. Kiesow, and Susan Y. Lyday, "The Functional Development and Evaluation of a Youth Staffing Model of the Paraprofessional Youth Worker," Extension Service, USDA, Special Project Report (Raleigh: North Carolina State University, Agricultural Extension Service, Department of Adult and Community College Education and Office of 4-H, 1974), pp. 29-31, 50-60.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Marjory M. Mortvedt and Elaine S. Karr, "Ohio 4-H Agent-Program Assistance Consensus on Tasks, Program Assistant Characteristics, Characteristics of the Work Relationship and Program Success" (Columbus: Ohio State University, Cooperative Extension Service, Office of Staff Development and Program Analysis, 1975), pp. 3, 12-13, 18 and Marjory Mortvedt, "Dilemma of Change," *Journal of Extension*, XV (November/December, 1977), 7.
5. Mary K. Munson, "A Comparative Study of Kansas and Missouri Extension Professionals' Attitudes Related to Employment of and

- Appropriate Tasks for 4-H Youth Paraprofessionals" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kansas State University, Manhattan, December, 1978), pp. 112-13.
6. Ivan H. Scheier, *People Approach: Nine Strategies for Citizen Volunteer Involvement* (Boulder, Colorado: National Information Center on Volunteerism, 1977), pp. 23-32.