

motivating the adult 4-H volunteer

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The energy crisis involves not only natural resources, but also human resources. To maintain the quality and quantity of existing 4-H programs, volunteers are more important than ever before. However, recruiting, motivating, training, supervising, and retaining volunteers is easier said than done. What does motivate an individual to become a 4-H volunteer? What keeps this person involved and committed to the 4-H program? How can Extension staff who work with volunteers keep them motivated?

What Is Motivation?

A number of ideas or theories explain how people are motivated. Motivation theory, according to Porter and Lawler, tries to explain how behavior gets started, is energized, is sustained, is directed, is stopped, and what kind of reaction is present in the individual while this is happening.¹ If 4-H staff can understand the behavior that occurs when a volunteer is motivated, the chances of effectively managing adults in their volunteer roles are increased.

. . . Extension staff working with 4-H volunteers should keep motivations in mind when determining volunteer tasks and when recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers.

Every 4-H staff member knows that motivating volunteers is difficult work. Somehow, volunteering must provide opportunities for people to meet certain needs. Most human service professionals are familiar with Maslow's needs hierarchy. Wilson suggests that volunteering provides the potential for meeting Maslow's higher level needs—belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization.²

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Theories of work motivation have provided other ways to view volunteering—for example, Herzberg suggests a “motivator-hygiene” theory.³ He says that factors that lead to job satisfaction are different than those that lead to dissatisfaction. In essence, the task given to people is the highest motivator. No matter which theory you believe, motivation remains a complex phenomenon and a challenge when working with any group of people.

Why People Volunteer

Within the past 15 years, a number of studies have been conducted on why people volunteer. Here are some of the most commonly mentioned reasons:

- To help people.
- Out of a sense of duty.
- One couldn’t refuse.
- A child was in the program.
- There was nothing else to do.
- Enjoyment of volunteer work.
- Volunteering might lead to a paying job.
- To improve the community.
- For self-growth.
- Because volunteering was a good use of free (leisure) time.
- To feel needed or useful.
- For a cause.
- To meet personal social needs.

The Extension 4-H volunteer manager must be aware of the needs that can be met within an individual through volunteering, as well as the organizational needs that can be accomplished. For example, not only is citizenship and leadership taught to youth through 4-H (organizational objective), but also leadership and citizenship are developed by adult volunteers (individual objective for the volunteer). An expectancy theory of motivation may give additional insights into how to work with volunteers and get them to work for 4-H.

Motivating via “Expectancy”

Motivation for 4-H volunteering has also been explained by using McClelland and Atkinson’s expectancy motivation theory.⁴ This theory suggests that *people behave as they do because they believe their behavior will lead to a desired reward or goal*. People make choices about volunteering based on their goals or needs and whether the volunteering will lead to the goals. The goals or needs may be consciously considered or they may be just gut-level feelings.

McClelland and Atkinson say that three factors affect behavior:

1. The need for *achievement*, which is defined as the capacity for taking pride in accomplishment.
2. The need for *affiliation*, defined as the concern for one's relationships with others.
3. The need for *power* or wanting to have an influence or impact on others.

Everyone is motivated by these three needs; however, some needs are stronger or weaker, depending on the individual and the situation.

People become attracted to climates that appeal to their dominant needs. People volunteer because of what they expect to have happen through the volunteering. If a 4-H volunteer expects to become closer to his/her children (a need for affiliation) through volunteering, then the volunteer will continue if this is occurring.

Minnesota Study

In the fall of 1978, a group of 200 adult 4-H volunteers (club leaders, project leaders, activity leaders, committee members, and other volunteers) were surveyed on what their motivations for volunteering in 4-H were.⁵ Questions were also asked concerning their characteristics and perceptions of volunteerism as leisure. Three major areas were addressed:

1. Why do adults volunteer in 4-H?
2. Are adult volunteers motivated most by affiliation, power, or achievement needs?
3. What relationships exist between the characteristics of volunteers and their motivations?

Why Adults Volunteer in 4-H

The results showed that the major reason why adults volunteered in 4-H was to be with their children. This was followed by these responses: liked helping people, liked associating with youth, and wanted to have influence on how people learn and grow. The results of the questions on motivations are shown in Table 1.

In general, these reasons given for volunteering aren't much different than other studies have found. A major study by ACTION⁶ and a recent study of Oklahoma 4-H leaders⁷ found that the major volunteer motivations included: wanting to help people, having a sense of duty, having a child in the program, and enjoying the volunteer experience. Similarly, Brown and Boyle in 1964 found that the chief motivator of 4-H volunteers was their children.⁸

**Table 1. Ranking* and percentages of agreement on motivation statements.
(N=165)**

Statement	Percentages			Rank
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to be with my child(ren) in the 4-H program. NEED: affiliation	3.6%	7.3%	89.2%	1
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like helping people. NEED: affiliation	1.2	4.2	94.6	2
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like associating with youth. NEED: affiliation		5.5	94.6	3
I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to have influence on how young people learn and grow. NEED: power	1.2	16.4	82.3	4
I volunteer in 4-H because it is a way to improve my community. NEED: achievement	2.4	12.1	85.4	5
I am a 4-H volunteer because it is a way I can express my caring and concern for others. NEED: affiliation	1.8	15.8	82.4	6
Volunteering in 4-H gives me a chance to meet other volunteers. NEED: affiliation	2.4	13.3	84.3	7
I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to learn new things. NEED: achievement	4.2	17.5	78.2	8
As a 4-H volunteer, I prefer to work with groups of people rather than alone. NEED: affiliation	6.1	23.0	70.9	9

*Ranking is based on the mean scores of the seven-point Likert continuum of strongly disagree to strongly agree used in the questionnaire.

Table 1 (continued)

I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to teach and lead others.				
NEED: power	5.5 %	13.3%	81.2%	10
I like being involved in the leadership of the 4-H program.				
NEED: power	4.8	20.0	75.2	11
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like the challenge of the task.				
NEED: achievement	4.8	20.6	74.6	12
I am a 4-H volunteer because I feel needed in the program.				
NEED: affiliation	4.8	20.0	75.2	13
As a 4-H volunteer, it is important to me that people like me.				
NEED: affiliation	8.5	20.6	70.9	14
As a 4-H volunteer, I have goals for what I want to accomplish as a volunteer.				
NEED: achievement	7.9	29.7	62.4	15
I am a 4-H volunteer because it is a constructive use of my leisure time.				
NEED: achievement	13.9	24.2	61.8	16
As a volunteer, I like to receive feedback from Extension staff, parents, and 4-H members about how I am doing.				
NEED: achievement	13.9	18.8	67.3	17
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like to be involved in making decisions and program planning.				
NEED: power	11.5	27.3	61.2	18
I am a 4-H volunteer because it is a task I can do well.				
NEED: achievement	7.3	42.4	50.3	19
As a 4-H volunteer, I enjoy being able to "do my own thing."				
NEED: power	21.8	40.6	37.5	20

Table 1 (continued)

I am a 4-H volunteer because I feel an obligation to 4-H because of what it has done for me.	NEED: achievement	33.9%	27.3%	38.8%	21
I volunteer in 4-H because I like to be responsible for 4-H programs.	NEED: power	20.6	47.9	31.5	22
I receive status in my community because I am a 4-H volunteer.	NEED: power	35.8	40.6	23.6	23
I am a 4-H volunteer because I can't say "no" when I'm asked.	NEED: affiliation	56.4	21.8	21.8	24
I am a 4-H volunteer because I like to receive recognition for being a volunteer.	NEED: power	59.4	32.7	7.9	25
I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to have influence over others.	NEED: power	57.6	26.7	15.7	26
I am a 4-H volunteer in order to gain experience and skills which might lead to employment.	NEED: achievement	67.9	22.4	9.7	27

*Greatest
Affiliation
Motivations*

When the reasons listed above were broken into the groups measuring the need for affiliation (concern about interactions with others), achievement (the capacity to take pride in accomplishment), and power (wanting to have influence over others), additional reasons for volunteering in 4-H were apparent. The greatest percentage of volunteers (84%) were motivated most by *affiliation* reasons. This was followed by 12% who were chiefly motivated by *achievement* and only 4% who were motivated by *power*.

Before the study, it was hypothesized that 4-H volunteers would probably be most achievement motivated given the nature of the organization. This wasn't the case. Concern for interactions with youth and other volunteers was very apparent.

4-H volunteers were asked what they'd do with their time if they weren't 4-H volunteers. Over 53% said they'd use the time to be with their families. 4-H is perhaps one aspect of today's lifestyle that serves as a way to bring the families of volunteers closer when the focal point is the 4-H program. Perhaps the emphasis on the family aspects of 4-H volunteering would be a way to recruit volunteers.

*Volunteer
Characteristics*

A number of statistically significant relationships were found about certain volunteer characteristics and motivations. Among the more interesting were:

- 4-H organizational leaders had higher achievement and affiliation needs than did project leaders or committee members.
- 4-H project leaders had higher achievement motivations than did those who weren't project leaders.
- 4-H committee members (those in decision-making positions) were the only group to score highest in power (the desire to have influence over others).
- The more hours per week one volunteered, the higher the motivation scores.
- Single 4-H volunteers scored higher in achievement than did married volunteers. People with no children scored highest in achievement motivations. People with three or more children scored highest in affiliation needs.
- 4-H volunteers who had once been 4-H members scored highest in both achievement and power motivations.
- 4-H volunteers with higher education levels had higher power motivation scores.
- Motivations differed by the sex of volunteers. Females scored higher in affiliation scores while males scored higher in achievement.

Implications

The results of this study indicate how Extension and 4-H professionals can better motivate volunteers. A need exists for more information about volunteers so better strategies can be developed for helping volunteers reach their personal goals and the goals of the organization.

Motivating volunteers depends on a number of perceptions about the individual volunteers and about the tasks they

perform. 4-H and other Extension professionals may want to keep in mind some of the following ideas:

1. Volunteers should be considered as staff in the organization. They should be given the "fringe" benefits given to other staff such as coffee breaks and opportunities for promotion and continuing education. These may be the only obvious rewards or "payment" that the volunteer may receive. These benefits provide opportunities for achievement and affiliation.
2. There's no such thing as a typical volunteer. Professional volunteers come in all shapes and sizes, ages, economic backgrounds, and sexes. Even though this study shows some relationships between characteristics and motivation, there are few differences, particularly among the volunteers who experienced affiliation motives.
3. Specific job descriptions may be useful for optimal recruitment, placement, and recognition of volunteers. The job description should give an indication of the kind of person needed. This can be matched to an individual's reasons for volunteering. For example, a job description for a music project leader would probably appeal most to someone with affiliation needs, whereas the coordinator of the county fair judges might appeal more to one who wished to meet power needs.
4. People don't volunteer without expectations. They have certain ideas and perceptions about what they hope to gain from the experience. The professional who works with volunteers must help volunteers ascertain their goals and expectations and help volunteers attain them.
5. Volunteer programs should be coordinated with volunteers in mind. This means planning tasks based on the individual's needs, recruiting by appealing to needs, supervising in a way that allows needs to be met, and rewarding people with what's important to them.
6. The most direct way to get someone to do something is simply to ask. Let the individual make the decision about whether to volunteer. Let the volunteer determine if the volunteering meets his/her conscious or unconscious needs. Most volunteers are really "voluntary recruits."
7. Motivations of volunteers may change depending on the situation and over a period of time. The professional working with volunteers must be aware of these changes as they occur.

8. There's no simple answer on how to motivate people. What motivates one person may not motivate another. The individual differences and the striving to match individual needs with organizational tasks is the challenge of working with volunteers as well as with paid staff.

Summary

The importance of being aware of volunteer needs can't be overlooked. Volunteers are an essential part of an organization such as 4-H, but this volunteer experience can also be an important part of the lives of the volunteers themselves. Extension staff working with 4-H volunteers should keep motivations in mind when determining volunteer tasks and when recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers.

Footnotes

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2. Marlene Wilson, *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs* (Boulder, Colorado: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976).
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5. Karla A. Henderson, "Motivations and Selected Characteristics of Adult Volunteers in Extension 4-H Youth Programs in Minnesota" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1979).
6. ACTION, *Americans Volunteer—1974* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974).
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8. Emory J. Brown and Patrick G. Boyle, *4-H in Urban Areas* (Washington, D.C.: National 4-H Club Foundation, 1964).