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Recognizing Adult Volunteer 4-H Leaders

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Introduction

Extension agents devote considerable effort and expense to coordinating county recognition activities. State or organizational volunteer recognition programs traditionally have consisted of publicly presenting extrinsic rewards to volunteers, based upon tenure. Impact, programmatic innovation, quality of service, or youth contributions to the 4-H program are usually unrewarded.

Kwarteng, Smith & Miller (1988) define recognition as formal or informal attention given to the volunteer to provide a sense of appreciation, security, and belonging. Determining which categories of recognition are most significant and the specific types of recognition which are most meaningful, however, is an open debate. Extrinsic recognition is recommended by several researchers (Murk & Stephan, 1990; Steele, 1994; Zeuschel & Hansel, 1989). Kwarteng, Smith & Miller believe that informal verbal recognition, praise, and encouragement by others involved in the program are the most important developmental factors. Informal methods of recognizing volunteers and their contributions are frequently overlooked in place of more formal methods, yet are often more effective (Holtham, 1989; Vineyard, 1981).

Most volunteer administration models, including ISOTURE (Boyce, 1969; Dolan, 1971), L-O-O-P (Penrod, 1991), the 4-H Leadership Development Model (Kwarteng, Smith & Miller, 1988) and GEMS (Culp, Castillo, Deppe & Wells, 1997) includes recognition as a component. The purpose of this study of tenured 4-H volunteers was to answer the following questions:

- What are the components of most county 4-H recognition programs?
- What do volunteers rate as the most meaningful recognition categories?
- What specific types of recognition are most important to volunteers?
- Where do volunteers most appreciate being recognized?
- What kinds of recognition are most meaningful and the sources of recognition most appreciated by volunteers who attend formal, state-wide recognition banquets.

Methodology

The population for this study was defined as all people attending the state 4-H Volunteer Recognition Banquet in 1996. Attending were 279 volunteers, whose tenure ranged from 5 to 55 years. The profile of this group was as follows: 82.2% female, 97.9% white; 84.4% married; 41.5% rural, non-farm residence, 36.6% on-farm residence; mean age of 50.1 years; 2.4 children, with 1.4 children currently living at home; 13.8 years of education; employed 24.1 hours per week outside of the home; 43.4% reported that their employers encouraged them to volunteer. Income levels were reported as follows: 29.1% - less than \$20,000, 26.6% - \$20 to \$30,000, 15.1% - \$30 to \$40,000 and 15.6% - 40 to 50,5000. They had served an average of 18.7 years as a 4- H volunteer, and provided 12.6 hours of service per month as a 4- H volunteer.

Data were collected during the luncheon via a four-page, 35 item questionnaire using Likert-type scales (5=very important, 1=very unimportant), rank-ordering, and frequency counts. Response rate was 72.04% (n=201). No attempt at follow-up was made. Validity was established by an expert panel. Reliability was established by testing the instrument with 211 Ohio 4-H volunteers. Mean Cronbach alphas ranged from .66 to .93 (mean = .82). Descriptive statistics were utilized.

Results

Extrinsic rewards and formal public events were identified as the most frequent components of county recognition programs. These included receiving plaques, certificates or pins, banquets, receiving complimentary fair passes, newspaper coverage, and receiving thank-you notes (see Table 1).

Table 1
Current Components of County-based Volunteer Recognition Programs

Label	Mean Rank	% Cases	N
Plaques, certificates, pins	1	78.8%	141
Banquet or Luncheon	2	76.5%	137
Complimentary fair passes	3	52.5%	94
Newspaper article/Media	4	47.5%	85
Thank-you notes	5	45.8%	82
Organizational newsletter	6	40.2%	72

Serving on committees	7	33.5%	60
Phone calls	8	19.6%	35
Reception/Tea	9	5.0%	9
Becoming a trainer	10	3.4%	6

4-H volunteers ranked informal, intrinsic rewards as more meaningful than receiving more formal, extrinsic forms of recognition. These included receiving personal thank-you notes, a "pat on the back," followed by attending recognition banquets (see Table 2.)

Table 2
Ranking of Most Meaningful Recognition Forms

Label	Mean Rank	Mean	S.D.	N	Freq Rank
Thank-you notes	1	2.46	1.68	167	1
"Pat on the back"	2	3.79	2.51	142	6
Formal recognition banquets	3	3.88	2.51	155	2
Information recognition (at a mtg)	4	4.07	1.84	144	5
Receiving plaques, pins, trays, etc.	5	4.18	2.23	153	3t
Phone calls	6	4.27	2.09	135	7
Recognition at state-wide event	7	4.34	2.33	153	3t
Home visits	8	5.52	2.05	117	8

When ranking their most meaningful sources of recognition, volunteers preferred recognition from their 4-H members and recognition at the local level to larger, more public sources. Those ranked as the most meaningful recognition sources included 4-H members, 4-H club programs, and county or community programs. State or district-wide activities and news media coverage were the lowest ranked, least desirable recognition sources (see Table 3.)

Table 3
Ranking of Most Meaningful Recognition Sources

Label	Mean Rank	Mean	S.D.	N	Freq Rank
4-H members	1	2.10	1.62	176	1
4-H club	2	2.30	1.51	164	2
County/Community	3	2.99	1.55	151	3
4-H Organizational Staff	4	4.49	1.94	119	6

Other volunteers in organization	5	4.94	2.42	129	5
State-wide	6	5.02	2.66	133	4
District-wide	7	5.75	1.90	110	8
News Media	8	6.35	2.17	115	7

When Likert rating their most important specific types of recognition, 4-H members' thank-you notes were followed by parents' thank-you notes, county recognition banquets, club achievement programs, Extension agents' thank-you notes and state recognition banquets (see Table 4).

Table 4
Rating of Most Important Specific Types of Recognition

Label	Mean Rank	Mean	S.D.	N	Freq Rank
Thank-you note from 4-H'er	1	4.26	0.89	151	7t
Thank-you note from a parent	2	4.23	0.77	154	2
County recognition banquet	3	4.22	0.86	153	3t
At club's Achievement night	4	4.14	0.82	149	10t
Thank-you note from Ext. Agent	5	4.14	0.91	158	1
State recognition banquet	6	4.04	0.97	152	5t
Phone call from a parent	7	3.86	0.93	153	3t
Receiving plaques, pins, trays	8	3.77	1.03	152	5t
Ceremony held at a state event	9	3.77	0.99	138	21
Phone call from an Ext. Agent	10	3.77	0.95	150	9
At a scheduled club meeting	11	3.75	0.96	146	13
Phone call from a 4-H member	12	3.72	0.88	148	12
A display at a county event	13	3.60	0.96	143	15t
District recognition banquet	14	3.60	0.90	141	20
Thank-you note from a volunteer	15	3.57	0.99	151	7t
Phone call from a volunteer	16	3.49	0.93	149	10t
Coverage in the news media	17	3.47	1.06	143	15t
A display at a state event	18	3.30	0.88	119	22
Home visit from a parent	19	3.01	1.10	145	14
Home visit from a 4-H member	20	3.00	1.05	142	17t

Home visit from an Ext. Agent	21	2.85	1.07	142	17t
Home visit from a volunteer	22	2.78	1.02	142	17t

Grassroots locations were preferred when volunteers ranked the places where they most appreciated receiving formal recognition. These included county-wide events, followed by 4-H club activities, with state recognition events being least desirable. Formal recognition was deemed unnecessary by one-fifth of the group (see Table 5.)

Table 5
Where 4-H Volunteers Appreciate Receiving Formal Recognition

Label	Rank	N	Percent
Locally, in my club	2	35	28.0
County-wide/Community event	1	50	40.0
State level	4	15	12.0
Don't need/want formal recognition	3	25	20.0

Conclusions

County-based recognition models usually consist of presenting plaques, certificates and pins at banquets.

Receiving a thank-you note was the most meaningful form of recognition. Thank-you notes from members, parents, Extension agents, and club, county and state recognition banquets were rated as the most important specific types of recognition. Volunteer recognition presented at county banquets and club meetings or activities were preferred over state recognition events.

Twenty percent (20%) of the volunteers did not want formal recognition. Intrinsic recognition forms were ranked as more desirable than extrinsic forms. 4-H members were identified as the most meaningful recognition source.

Implications

The most meaningful recognition which Extension agents can provide is to foster opportunities for 4-H members to do it. Extension agents should encourage 4-H members to express appreciation to volunteers individually, at a local club meeting, by writing thank-you notes or giving a spontaneous "pat on the back." The most meaningful formal volunteer recognition programs occur at the county and club levels. Extension agents should design county recognition efforts which emphasize informal, intrinsic and personal forms of recognition, (while continuing more formalized recognition activities.)

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