

RECOGNIZING TENURED 4-H ADULT VOLUNTEERS

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Abstract

Conducting volunteer recognition activities consumes considerable time and effort on the part of Extension agents who function as volunteer coordinators. But what types and sources of recognition do 4-H volunteers most appreciate? The purpose of this study was to inquire of current tenured 4-H volunteers what broad categories and specific kinds of recognition they most value, as well as by whom they most appreciate being recognized. Data were collected from 279 volunteers attending a state 4-H volunteer recognition banquet. While formal public events were the most frequent components of county recognition programs, 4-H volunteers ranked informal rewards, which generated intrinsic feelings of recognition as more desirable. Therefore, initiatives which emphasize informal, personal recognition of volunteers, which are designed to stimulate intrinsic feelings of accomplishment, importance, or self-worth, in combination with public events, will enhance the effectiveness of the organization's volunteer recognition program.

Introduction

Extension Agents devote considerable time, effort and resources to coordinating county volunteer recognition activities. County, state or organizational volunteer recognition programs have traditionally consisted of publicly presenting extrinsic rewards (including certificates, plaques, and pins) based upon tenure, to adult 4-H volunteers providing leadership to organized clubs. Impact, programmatic innovation, quality of service, contributions made by youth volunteers, or recognition given to "non-traditional volunteers" providing service to the 4-H program are usually unacknowledged and are frequently unrewarded.

Most volunteer administration models, including ISOTURE (Boyce, 1969; Dolan, 1971), The Bridge from Dreams to Reality (Vineyard, 1984); the 4-H Leadership Development Model (Kwarteng, Smith & Miller, 1988); L-O-O-P (Penrod, 1991); and GEMS (Culp, Castillo, Deppe & Wells, 1998) cited recognition as an

administrative component. Kwarteng, Smith and Miller (1988) defined recognition as "formal or informal, favorable attention given to the volunteer, to provide a sense of appreciation, security and belonging" (p. 60). Determining which categories of recognition are most significant, and the specific types of recognition which are most meaningful to volunteers, however, is an open debate.

Extrinsic recognition is recommended by several researchers (Murk & Stephan, 1990; Steele, 1994; Zeuschel & Hansel, 1989). Moreover, informal methods of recognizing volunteers and their contributions to the program are frequently overlooked in place of more formal methods. However, informal recognition methods are often more effective than formal recognition activities (Holtham, 1989; Vineyard, 1981). Kwarteng, Smith and Miller (1988) believed that informal verbal recognition, praise and encouragement by others involved in the program are the most important developmental factors.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study of tenured Ohio 4-H volunteers was to determine the most effective and meaningful forms, sources, and specific types of recognition. This descriptive research included the following research questions.

1. What are the components of county 4-H recognition programs?
2. What categories are rated by tenured 4-H volunteers as most meaningful?
3. What specific types of recognition are rated by tenured 4-H volunteers as most important?
4. In which locations do tenured 4-H volunteers most appreciate being recognized?
5. What kinds of recognition are most meaningful to tenured 4-H volunteers who attend formal, state-wide recognition banquets?
6. From which sources is recognition most appreciated by tenured 4-H volunteers who attend formal, state-wide recognition banquets?

Methodology

Population and Sample

The population for this study was defined as all tenured Ohio 4-H volunteers. For the purposes of this study, a "tenured" 4-H volunteer was defined as one with five or more years of service to the 4-H program. The sample included all tenured 4-H volunteers attending Ohio's state 4-H Volunteer Recognition Banquet in 1996 ($n=279$).

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data were collected during the luncheon via a 35-item questionnaire using Likert-type scales (5=very important, 1=very unimportant), rank-ordering and frequency counts. Response rate was 72.04% ($n=201$). Because the questionnaire was administered at a public banquet which nearly prohibited coding of the questionnaires, no attempt at follow-up was made. Validity of the questionnaire was established prior to administration by an expert panel. The panel was comprised of Extension 4-H Youth Development agents and specialists, at Purdue and The Ohio State Universities; and professors in Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Foundations and Administration at Purdue University. Reliability was established by testing the instrument with 211 Ohio 4-H volunteers. Cronbach alphas for recognition items ranged from .66 to .93, which were in the acceptable range for new instruments. Therefore, none of the items on the pilot test questionnaire were modified for the final instrument.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed utilizing SPSS for Windows. Descriptive statistics were employed to describe the data.

Results

The typical demographic profile of tenured 4-H volunteers who attended the state 4-H Volunteer Recognition Banquet was as follows: 82.2% female, 97.9% white; 84.4% married; 4.15% 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; and, 43.4% reported that their employers encouraged them to volunteer. Reported income levels were as follows: 29.1% earned less than \$20,000; 26.6% earned \$20 to

\$30K; 15.1% earned \$30 to \$40K; and 15.6% earned \$40 to \$50K. The typical volunteer had served 4-H an average of 18.7 years, while providing an average of 12.6 hours of service per month to 4-H.

Tenured 4-H volunteers in this study identified extrinsic rewards and formal recognition banquets as the most recurrent components of

county recognition programs. Extrinsic rewards included plaques, certificates, pins, and complimentary fair passes. Nearly one-half of the respondents reported receiving written or printed forms of recognition, including news releases in local newspapers, thank-you notes, and articles in the local 4-H newsletter (see Table 1.)

Table 1. Current Components of County-based Volunteer Recognition Programs

Label	Freq Rank	% Cases	<u>N</u>
Plaques, certificates, pins, etc.	1	78.8%	141
Recognition 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

When asked to rank their most meaningful recognition categories, tenured 4-H volunteers generally ranked informal, spontaneous, intrinsic rewards as more meaningful than receiving more formal, extrinsic, planned categories of recognition. These included receiving personal thank-you notes, and a “pat on the back,” followed by attending formal recognition banquets. Interestingly, “formal recognition banquets” and “recognition at a state-wide event” received mean ordinal rankings of third and seventh, respectively. However, these categories received frequency rankings of second and third, respectively. This discrepancy is likely due to the survey population, which was conditioned to receiving recognition in the form of receiving plaques, pins, certificates,

and silver trays, at large, formal recognition banquets (see Table 2.)

When ranking their most meaningful sources of recognition, tenured volunteers preferred to be recognized by their 4-H members at the local level. Larger, more public recognition forms or sources, (i.e. regional or state-wide events) were less meaningful to the volunteers. Those ranked as the most meaningful recognition sources included 4-H members, 4-H clubs (groups of 4-H club members), and county-wide or community recognition programs.

State or district-wide recognition activities and news media coverage were the lowest ranked,

least desirable recognition sources (see Table 3 .)

When Likert rating their most important specific types of recognition, tenured 4-H volunteers largely identified personal, informal types of recognition, preferably from those with whom they worked most closely (specifically, 4-H members in their own club.) These specific types

of recognition included thank-you notes from 4-H members, followed by thank-you notes from 4-H member's parents, county recognition banquets, club achievement programs, thank-you notes from Extension Agents, and state recognition banquets. Phone calls, public displays, and home visits were among the least important specific types of recognition (see Table 4).

Table 2. Ranking of Most Meaningful Recognition Categories

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

"Tied ranks.

Table 3. Ranking of Most Meaningful Recognition Sources

Label	Mean Rank	<u>M</u>	SD	<u>N</u>	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 the 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

Table 4. Rating of Most Important Specific Types of Recognition

Label	Mean Rank	<u>M</u>	SD	<u>N</u>	Freq Rank
Thank-you note from 4-Her	1	4.26	0.89	151	7"
Thank-you note from a parent	2	4.23	0.77	154	2
County recognition banquet	3	4.22	0.86	153	3"
At your club's Achievement night	4	4.14	0.82	149	10"
Thank-you note from Ext. Agent	5	4.14	0.91	158	1
State recognition banquet	6	4.04	0.97	152	5"
Phone call from a parent	7	3.86	0.93	153	3"
Receiving plaques, pins, trays	8	3.77	1.03	152	5"
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	15"
District recognition banquet	14	3.60	0.90	141	20
Thank-you note from a volunteer	15	3.57	0.99	151	7"
Phone call from a volunteer	16	3.49	0.93	149	10"
Coverage in the news media	17	3.47	1.06	143	15"
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	17"
Home visit from an Ext. Agent	21	2.85	1.07	142	17"
Home visit from a volunteer	22	2.78	1.02	142	17"

"Tied ranks.

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

Conclusions

Adult 4-H volunteers in Ohio are most frequently recognized on a county basis by receiving plaques, certificates, and 4-H pins at a county-wide, formal banquet or luncheon. Just over half also reported receiving complimentary fair passes; important in a state where gate admission is charged at all county fairs.

Informal rewards which precipitated intrinsic recognition were ranked as more desirable than were extrinsic forms. Informal recognition included receiving a thank-you note, which was identified as the most meaningful form of recognition. A spontaneous "pat on the back," was identified as the second most meaningful recognition form, while attending a formal recognition banquet or luncheon was third.

When identifying the most meaningful recognition sources, tenured 4-H volunteers clearly identified those with whom they have direct contact as most desirable. 4-H members were found to be the most meaningful source of recognition, with the volunteer's own 4-H club following closely in second. Recognition received from the 4-H organization, other volunteers, and district or state recognition were not found to be meaningful sources.

Thank-you notes from members, parents, Extension agents, and club, county and state recognition banquets/programs were rated as the most important specific types of recognition.

Home visits from any group of individuals (parents, 4-Hers, agents, or other volunteers) were the lowest ranked specific types of recognition.

Formal volunteer recognition presented at county banquets and local club meetings or activities were preferred over state recognition events. However, 20% of the volunteers indicated they did not want formal recognition.

Recommendations

The most meaningful recognition activities which Extension agents can design are opportunities for 4-H members to recognize and express appreciation to their 4-H volunteers. It is, therefore, recommended that agents encourage and provide educational opportunities for junior leaders or older 4-H member to teach members at club meetings and activities the importance of writing a thank-you note, expressing appreciation verbally, or giving a spontaneous "pat on the back." Utilizing a lesson plan designed to teach 4-H members how to write a thank-you note, and providing thank-you notes to 4-H members at the fair and through the Extension office may facilitate this recommendation.

As the most meaningful formal volunteer recognition programs are those which occur at the county and club levels, it is recommended that agents foster and encourage 4-H clubs to conduct their own personalized volunteer recognition programs. These could include card showers, volunteer appreciation nights, a potluck

appreciation dinner, or an informal appreciation program.

It is recommended that Extension agents design county recognition efforts which emphasize informal, intrinsic and personal forms of recognition. These recognition efforts should be on-going, spontaneous, innovative, and fun.

If formalized recognition activities are currently in place, it is recommended that they be continued as a component of a total county-based recognition model. While the purpose of these programs is to provide recognition to volunteers on a county-wide basis, their accompanying benefits to the total 4-H program cannot be overlooked. These include increased visibility and marketing awareness of the 4-H program, as well as an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments and successes.

As 4-H members were identified as the most meaningful source of recognition, it is, therefore, recommended that 4-H members be included in recognition activities however possible. This may be accomplished by recognizing the volunteer's own club members, recognizing the club members with the volunteer, or asking a member of the volunteer's own club to present an award to the volunteer.

The purpose of extrinsic forms of recognition should be to generate intrinsic recognition. Thus, it is recommended, that extrinsic recognition forms stimulate personal, internalized feelings of accomplishment, fulfillment, and self-worth which signify to the volunteer that they are appreciated and have made an impact or contribution to their 4-H members, or the 4-H program.

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