



Growing Kansas 4-H Through Collaboration

Kansas 4-H wanted to reach new audiences, engage more volunteers in 4-H, and gather the resources needed to significantly grow the 4-H program. To that end, the Kansas 4-H Foundation, the Department of 4-H Youth Development, and K-State Research and Extension partnered to create the Growing Kansas Leaders: 4-H Program Expansion grant program.

In a staggered start over five years, three cohorts turned in impressive results. 4-H enrollment and volunteer numbers increased, new partnerships were formed, and new clubs were established. The grant recipients used facilitated community discussions to create plans, monthly calls with cohorts to mentor peer communities, and face-to-face meetings to celebrate learning and success.

The long-term impact of the investment in time, effort, and resources within this expansion plan is seen through increased number of youth and volunteers, enhanced quality and variety of programs, and stronger collaboration through new partnerships. This work will improve the lives of young people across Kansas. Other 4-H programs can apply these principles and best practices to achieve success.

Principles

- » Every child deserves an opportunity for positive youth development.
- » 4-H happens at the local level with guidance and support from the Department of 4-H Youth Development.
- » Local level flexibility, creativity, innovation, and experimentation are key.
- » To grow 4-H, we must increase the number of screened volunteers.

- » Progress toward desired outcomes requires inspiration, motivation, persistence, and commitment of time.
- » Growth requires change, patience, and time.

Goals should reflect local priority needs as identified by an assessment process. Examples of programmatic goals might include:

- » Increase the number of 4-H youth by 25 percent.
- » Increase volunteer participation by 20 percent.
- » Increase club (community, project or SPIN — special interest) by 15 percent.
- » Increase retention of 4-H families by 10 percent.

Assessment Process

- » Determine local unit readiness at Program Development Committee (PDC) and extension board meetings.
- » Study community demographics/GPS mapping to determine number and location of youth to serve.
- » Convene a community meeting of those involved with youth development and others who care about youth in the community.
- » Contract for the services of a trained facilitator outside of the local community but who knows how extension operates.
- » Receive extension board approval. (If applicable, have grant request signed by board chair or noted in monthly board minutes.)

The 14 Extension units involved in the grant program experienced measurable impacts:

4-H membership
increased by

464

4-H volunteers
increased by

458

New clubs
increased by

50

New partnerships
formed

61

Best Practices

Collaboration — internal

- » Find key advocates within the PDC and extension board.
- » Explore collaboration with fellow agents.
- » Explore collaboration with existing programs.
- » Research what other states are doing to successfully grow 4-H.
- » Establish consistent communication with extension board, local foundation, development committees, commissioners, PDC, and other stakeholders.

Collaboration — external

- » Develop a clear message about current programing, plan for expansion, and what might be needed from new partners.
- » Take advantage of professional development offered through, or that support, the initiative. Ask partners what opportunities are available for extension staff.
- » Build relationships with other people and organizations who serve youth.
- » Cultivate corporate partnerships for volunteers or funding.

Engagement — new families, volunteers, kids

- » Recruit and train new family coordinator volunteer in each community club.
- » Register, orient, and train new volunteers, including teaching methods, facilitation skills, youth engagement, and project content.
- » Explain benefits of volunteering, for both the volunteer and the organization.
- » Be purposeful in your efforts to build relationships with potential volunteers.
- » Develop culturally appropriate strategies and materials.
- » Create an inclusive and welcoming environment.
- » Understand more deeply the demographics of your community and the programmatic implications.

Accountability

- » Clearly define annual deliverables.
- » Share knowledge and questions with other extension units monthly.
- » Agree on what you will measure and then measure it.
- » Review progress towards outcomes regularly.
- » Develop a specific plan of action, review it often, and make continuous adjustments for improvement.

Sustainability

- » Volunteer development is critical for program expansion.
- » Support and empower volunteers.
- » Celebrate and recognize volunteers.
- » Develop strategies to generate additional resources and new volunteers to support and continue program expansion.
- » Document and share the process for program replication and improvement.
- » Evaluate program impact toward addressing identified community needs.
- » Measure outcomes to determine effectiveness of time and resources invested. Make assessment as to continuation of program expansion.
- » Remember this work is adaptive and not all efforts may be sustained.

Although this framework may appear sequential and linear, in reality, it is much more dynamic. It is adaptive in nature, requiring continual assessment to ensure that measurable progress can be made throughout the plan.



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