

The Teen Excellence in Leadership Institute (TELI)

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

A current trend in positive youth development includes providing new and innovative programs for adolescents, which incorporate the growth of the Five Cs: competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005; Larson, 2006; Crawford, Lang, Fink, & Dalton, 2011). Additionally, problem solving, decision making, and communication skills development within a leadership context is essential to foster career readiness (Rutherford, Stedman, Felton, Wingenbach, & Harlen, 2004). Youth leadership development programs foster a sense of belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence amongst youth participants (Worker, 2014). With all of this in mind, a planning team was brought together to develop a robust teen leadership program in Virginia. The program targets motivated youth from both 4-H and FFA organizations to engage in collective capacity building.

In response, the team produced the Teen Excellence in Leadership Institute (TELI) program, which engages and develops outstanding teens to actively work to identify and address global issues that face communities today. TELI combines two face-to-face weekend seminars and two interactive virtual sessions for team project development and updates. Supplemental content on peer feedback interactions and political process engagement are integrated in recorded and archived virtual learning. In addition, youth-adult partnerships are incorporated. The effectiveness of these partnerships support positive leadership growth for teens (Anderson & Sandmann, 2009). The experience fuses a diverse lineup of topics that lead youth to a more holistic consideration of their personal leadership skills and philosophies. The program supports the National Research Agenda for the American Association for Agricultural Education Priority 3- Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce that Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016).

How it Works

The TELI program was designed to meet the following goals: 1) to understand self and develop a personalized action plan for engaged leadership, 2) to network with other teens interested in learning about the issues facing youth and communities, 3) to design a team project to address community leadership needs in Virginia, 4) to learn more about advocacy and outreach that will improve the lives of others. Several frameworks and models reflect the overarching goals of the program and were utilized to create the TELI model. Ricketts and Rudd (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of youth leadership development and established a conceptual model that included five dimensions: leadership knowledge and information; leadership attitude, will, and desire; decision making, reasoning, and critical thinking; oral and written communication skills; and intra and interpersonal relations. With this model in mind, Chickering's Theory of Identity Development and the 4-H Citizenship Framework were combined to create the TELI model. Chickering's (1993) Theory of Identity Development, which is commonly utilized within FFA, includes seven vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Additionally, the 4-H Citizenship Framework by incorporating the key focus areas of civic engagement, service, civic education, and personal development (4-H National Headquarters, 2011). These models and frameworks were utilized to build a solid foundation for teen leadership development.

All program participants must apply and accompanied by a nomination form from their 4-H agent or FFA advisor. Participants are then selected and receive a partial scholarship to attend two face-to-face weekend seminars and two interactive virtual sessions. The full curriculum incorporates personal assessments, skill development, guest speakers, and team- and project-based learning. Topics include: Strengths-Based Leadership, problem solving style, group facilitation skills, youth-adult partnerships, team building, project collaboration, peer feedback and evaluation, leadership principles, facilitation, citizenship, and critical reflection. Such topics and skills are typically offered through adult programming. However, based on previous research, exposing teens early is an advantage for developing young leaders.

Each participant also works on a team-based project to identify and address a community-wide issue. Team projects are presented to an invited panel of agricultural and leadership stakeholders. Participants receive feedback throughout the process from the TELI leadership team as well as stakeholders. The participants each complete a personalized action plan for implementation into their daily lives upon completion of the program.

Results to Date

At the conclusion of cohorts one and two, participants were surveyed and asked to indicate agreement with 16 4-H Citizenship common measures using a four-point Likert scale, reflecting on views before TELI and after TELI. The 16 4-H Citizenship common measures were chosen based on the goals of the TELI program to begin uniform data collection suitable for ongoing studies and sharing with youth development practitioners (National 4-H Headquarters, 2011). Paired t-tests were used to examine whether statistical differences existed between pre- and post-survey results. Cohort one respondents indicated a statistically significant change ($N=15, p < .05$) for all 16 common measures evaluated. Cohort two participants indicated statistically significant change ($N=16, p < .05$) for 14 of the 16 common measures evaluated.

Future Plans

Currently in the third year of programming, TELI has evolved over time in response to participant survey data from both cohorts and focus group data from Cohort Two. The TELI team intends to develop a program manual for implementing teen leadership training utilizing the TELI model. This manual will provide a framework for other states to successfully replicate the program. We also plan to implement a sustainability/transition plan for ongoing leadership of the current program, holding true to program planning methods incorporating continuous evaluation for improvement. Additionally, given acquisition of adequate resources regionally, teams could be empowered to implement their issues-based team projects in their communities. At present, the project solutions are presented by the teams, but not enacted due to the geographically disperse nature of each project team and limitations imposed by resources and liability.

Costs/Resources Needed

A committed leadership team is required to dedicate time and energy into seminar development and implementation. The costs associated with the program included travel, lodging, conference room rental, meals, assessment instruments, and related activity costs. The average cost is approximately \$450 per participant, costs are reduced by utilizing 4-H educational and conference centers for lodging and programming space. Each participant contributes a \$199 programming fee and the remainder is paid for by a scholarship provided by foundation and individual donor funds.

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