

**Assessing the 4-H Volunteerism PRKC of National Association of Extension 4-H  
Association Members**

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### **Introduction / Need for Research**

The 4-H youth development programs seeks to develop life skills in children and youth ages 5-18 (National 4-H Council, 2020). The 4-H program has a storied history dating back to over 100 years, and is the youth development program of the land-grant university system (National 4-H Headquarters, 2017). Volunteers play an integral role in both the leadership and outreach of local 4-H programs, as 4-H volunteers help others learn by delivering educational programs, and gain satisfaction from doing so (White & Arnold, 2003). In fact, 4-H nationally has a network of over 500,00 volunteers (National 4-H Council, 2020). Volunteers are vital to the success of the 4-H program, and it is important that youth professionals understand the roles and responsibilities of professional volunteerism (Culp et al., 2007). Harder et al. (2010) identified volunteer development as a core competency that 4-H Extension agents need to be understand in order to be successful. It is critically important to ensure 4-H youth development professionals are knowledgeable and competent in volunteerism in order to advance the mission of the 4-H youth program.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The 4-H Professional Research, Knowledge and Competencies (PRKC) is a professional development framework that can be used to identify competency gaps and training needs of 4-H Extension professionals (National 4-H Headquarters, 2017). The 4-H PRKC has been used previously in California (Heck et al., 2009) and the western 4-H region (Varrella et al., 2016) to guide professional development efforts of 4-H Extension professionals. The PRKC consists of six competency domains: (a) youth development, (b) youth program development, (c) volunteerism, (d) equity, access, and opportunity, (e) partnerships, and (f) organizational systems. For our study, we chose the 4-H PRKC domain of volunteerism, which consists of 43 competencies.

### **Purpose & Objectives**

The purpose of our study was to assess the professional development needs of NAE4-HA members using the volunteerism 4-H PRKC. Our study's objectives were to: (a) describe NAE4-HA members' perceptions of their ability levels and importance of volunteerism competencies, and (b) compare ability and importance level for each volunteerism competency to determine priority training needs for NAE4-HA members. Ours study is part of a larger professional development assessment, and aligns with priority three of the 2016-2020 National Research Agenda – Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce which Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century (Roberts et al., 2016).

### **Methods**

We used quantitative methodology to satisfy the objectives of our study. At the time of our study there were 3,316 NAE4-HA members. We used a systematic sampling procedure to decrease

survey fatigue of NAE4-HA membership (Dillman, 2009), as our study is part of a larger professional development assessment. We separated NAE4-HA members into two distinct groups of 1,658 members each, and we assigned one group to our study. We used the Borich model design, which is commonly used to assess competencies and professional development needs (Hall & Broyles, 2016; Harder & Narine, 2019), to assess the volunteerism competencies of NAE4-HA members. We used an online survey and asked participants to rate their perceived ability levels and their perceived importance of each volunteerism competency statement using a five-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the 43 items assessing volunteerism competencies was 0.88, which indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). We calculated a mean weighted discrepancy score (MWDS) (Borich 1980) to identify the difference between how important a respondent believed a competency to be and how able the respondent perceived him/herself to be at performing that competency.

### **Results**

Results indicated the top five professional development needs of highest priority were "Understands best practices for engaging first generation volunteers" (MWDS = 4.99), "Identifies and engages expanded, diverse audiences as volunteers" (MWDS = 4.90), "Implements disciplinary strategies as needed including remediation, counseling, probation and dismissal" (MWDS = 4.88), "Understands and implements multiple recruitment strategies based upon role responsibilities and community demographics" (MWDS = 4.57), and "Provides educational opportunities for volunteers on expansion and outreach to new and diverse audiences" (MWDS = 4.54). The lowest priority needs were "Develops and demonstrates personal philosophy of volunteerism in congruence with professional ethics" (MWDS = 1.94), "Understands various volunteer roles and value to the organization" (MWDS = 2.16), and "Understand fundamentals of human motivation as related to volunteerism" (MWDS = 2.17). There were no negative MWDS.

### **Conclusions / Implications / Recommendations**

Harder et al. (2010) explain that Extension professionals that are not competent in their specific programmatic area will not be able to be successful in their Extension job. The results of this study provide a priority ranking of competency needs for NAE4-HA members. The results of this study provide a different snapshot of professional development needs compared to the study by Heck et al. (2009). This could be due to the eleven-year difference between studies, or the fact that this study was conducted on a national scale rather than Heck et al.'s study that was conducted in California. NAE4-HA leadership, as well as state 4-H programs, can use the results of this study to create professional development and training programs for both new and seasoned 4-H Extension professionals. Due to the importance of understanding volunteerism within the 4-H program, NAE4-HA and state 4-H programs should create onboarding training specifically targeted towards the volunteerism PRKC. Though there is much research surrounding volunteerism, the Extension literature is scant related to the volunteerism training needs, as well as training success, of volunteerism professional development programs. More research is needed to understand the impact of the 4-H PRKC on county 4-H programs.

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