

## ***Tips for Improving 4-H Club Vibrancy***

Tips for improving vibrancy in each of the 5 domains of vibrancy that you could implement.

### **PHILOSOPHY**

- ⇒ In your club programs, bring youth into the planning, development, implementation and evaluation processes. Many clubs have youth planning committees to give structured advice to the program or organization. Other clubs are using anonymous suggestion boxes for feedback and youth input.
- ⇒ Develop more programs that actively engage youth in their own learning as self-directed learners.
- ⇒ Involve youth in “real time” community service projects that make a difference in the quality of life in their community.
- ⇒ Ensure that program staff understand that youth should feel secure enough to try out new ideas and approaches without fear of ridicule.
- ⇒ Develop a mentoring system where older youth or adults are paired with youth participants. Many groups have found “buddy systems” or junior officers effective strategies for helping set the tone in youth groups.
- ⇒ Connect youth and youth programs to the community in which they live. Exchange trips, visits to other clubs, and other methods to explore what other groups are doing are effective ways to open new horizons for youth.

### **CULTURE**

- ⇒ Develop a youth advisory board to give input to program staff. Avoid token youth representation on adult councils or committees. Some counties have even established County Youth Commissions to advise county commissioners on youth-related issues.
- ⇒ Engage youth in developing rules and guidelines for the program.
- ⇒ Practice listening to youth through focus groups, encounter sessions or other ways.
- ⇒ Ensure the security and safety of your meeting facilities. Make sure all 4-H programs are conducted in “family-friendly” facilities.
- ⇒ Develop a shared cultural value in which everyone is respected and valued for who they are and for what they can become. Celebrate the successes of everyone.

### **POWER STRUCTURE**

- ⇒ Screen adult staff for their attitudes towards youth involvement. Make sure all club leaders and project leaders subscribe to the “youth as partners” approach.
- ⇒ Provide training to all staff in youth/adult partnerships. An excellent resource is “Creating Youth/Adult Partnerships” from the National 4-H Council.
- ⇒ Pair youth members with adult staff in all teaching and coaching roles, modeling youth involvement and contribution.

“Making 4-H Clubs Vibrant,” Strengthening Clubs 2 Training, Kansas 4-H, December 2008

## **PROGRAMS**

- ⇒ Constantly evaluate the range of programs you are offering to ensure relevancy and value to youth members. Offer a variety of ways for youth to evaluate throughout the year—anonymous surveys, focus-group interviews, open discussions or group meetings. Many groups use an anonymous method of soliciting ideas about needed improvements using a ballot box for written comments. Other groups have used more formal methods of evaluating the group's meetings and activities.
- ⇒ Anchor your programs in a knowledge of “best practices” for positive youth development. Consult with experts in what kinds of programs and approaches are proven and scientifically defensible. Check out the “Programs of Excellence” profiled by CSREES or nationally-juried curriculum through 4-H CCS.
- ⇒ Involve members of the community as instructors, resource people and in governance roles to ensure the program is anchored in the community.
- ⇒ Keep 4-H clubs small (no larger than 25-35 members) so that youth get individualized attention.
- ⇒ Analyze the subtle messages of the physical facilities where you hold meetings. Is the atmosphere inviting? Think purposively about seating arrangements.
  - ✓ Do the facilities communicate a sense of warmth and welcoming?
  - ✓ What is the nature of your signage? Do you have numerous “Don't” signs which communicate negative messages and punitive measures for non-compliance?
  - ✓ Have you arranged your space to appeal to youth rather than be convenient for the staff?
  - ✓ What considerations have you given to seating arrangements and configurations?

## **STAFF**

- ⇒ Provide several incentives to volunteer staff to ensure a long-term commitment to youth and to the program. These incentives may be financial but they can also be non-material.
- ⇒ How do you create a sense of loyalty and belonging among volunteers and paid staff? Provide ways for your staff to interact informally outside of the program in ways that are fun.
- ⇒ Recruit people who develop trust easily and who are trust worthy.
- ⇒ Recruit volunteers and staff who know how to deal with the unexpected and are flexible.
- ⇒ Train your volunteers and staff to be advocates for youth and take a prominent role in the community in advocating for the rights and abilities of young people.
- ⇒ Conduct in-service training for volunteers and paid staff in youth development principles and strategies to improve their skill base. Constant training is necessary to keep everyone up to current standards and skills.

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