



Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative



Program Description

4-H has always helped prepare youth for the workforce. However, to be most effective, we need to intentionally link our work with young people to workforce preparation, and better document and report our impacts to stakeholders. The **Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation (WFP) Initiative** was developed to do this while strengthening and expanding programs to develop job skills for youth. The **targeted participants** are Extension professionals and decision-makers, and ultimately 4-H youth and volunteers.

Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative Goals

1. Provide a **framework** to guide resource investment and workforce preparation program direction
2. Develop **marketing tools and strategies** to increase awareness and promote workforce preparation program partnership linkage
3. Develop and disseminate **programming models, curriculum, and resource** to improve and expand workforce preparation programming
4. Conduct workforce preparation **training** with Extension professionals.
5. Create **evaluation tools and strategies** to better document and share results
6. Secure **funding** to support workforce preparation programming priorities



Key Components of Ohio's

4-H WFP Model

- Career Awareness & Exploration
- Skill Development
- Work-Based Learning
- Post-Secondary Internships
- Lifelong Learning



"I think workforce prep skills need to be incorporated in all youth programming to some degree."

4-H Educator

Skills for Success in the Knowledge Economy

Drawing from the current literature and programming experience in Ohio, a group of OSU Extension professional identified a framework of six categories of skills that support the knowledge economy.

- Thinking Skills
- Communication
- Teamwork and Leadership
- Lifelong Learning and Self-Direction
- Technology Adoption and Application
- Professionalism and Ethics

The Framework: Ohio's Workforce Preparation Model

In 2006, a team of Extension professionals researched the issue and developed *The Ohio Workforce Preparation Overview*, a framework or model of key workforce preparation program components in Ohio 4-H. Adapted from the National 4-H Council (1993) model, the framework guides Extension professionals in aligning their programming with current issues, key skills youth need, and critical components of workforce preparation. Within the context of positive youth development philosophy, workforce preparation programs engage youth through distinct but connected experiences.

The goals of workforce preparation programs are to introduce young people to the world of work and to develop the workforce skills necessary for success through active participation in learning experiences. Workforce preparation strategies must build on an early foundation of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences to most effectively achieve long-term results. Our work is aligned with a **definition of workforce preparation that includes a network of programs** designed to help young people explore career opportunities, acquire applied skills, develop work readiness, and gain experience in the workforce.

Research Base: The Need for Workforce Preparation Programming

Skills for the 21st Century. Preparing youth for the workforce is a major concern in U.S. society. In the last 30 years, the skills required for youth to succeed in the economy have changed radically. Employers are reporting that young workers are lacking key skills necessary for success in today's workplace. Workforce preparation programs represent an opportunity to address the skills gap.

Begin Early. Workforce preparation is a process, not a one-time event, and therefore should begin early. The need to start workforce preparation at the elementary age level is a recommendation echoed throughout the literature. Children are ready for workforce preparation experiences at early ages, but the experiences must be developmentally appropriate.

Keep Youth Engaged. Although adolescent employment has been the topic of previous research, much of it has focused on the number of hours worked per week, with little attention paid to the quality of the work experience or the developmental opportunities it affords. In addition, many youth are unaware of the skills they need and are unskilled in the steps required to make them "job-ready" to meet their career goals. Increasing youths' skills will better able them in securing better, higher paying jobs that can sustain them in today's economy.

Role of Out-of-School Programs. After-school programs have been suggested as an ideal place to focus on developing skills needed for the 21st century workforce. Research conducted over the past 20 years has found that 4-H experiences in Ohio have a positive impact on the development of general workplace competencies. Youth develop life skills through 4-H projects and experiences such as being a camp counselor.



"Far too many young people are inadequately prepared to be successful in the workplace."

Evaluation, Lessons Learned, and Implications

Current evaluation for this initiative has been through reflection sessions with our Workforce Preparation Team, small group discussion, and reactions from stakeholders. While outputs and outcomes from specific efforts are described here, a look at the evaluation thus far of the larger Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative shows the following:

Our structure, the process, and how it unfolded was a key to success. Important aspects were forming an initiative, dedicating a portion of someone's time to provide leadership to the project, using a team approach, and creating a larger advisory committee to gather input and get feedback.

Using a framework laid the foundation for our work. We developed working knowledge of the current research base. Sufficient time was allowed for concepts to be developed, shared, revisited, and discussed. The *Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Overview* was then used to drive decisions, make targeted investments, and focus programming.

Collective energy organized around a framework resulted in a synergy; the initiative served as a catalyst versus working in isolation. The initiative has already been successful in helping our educators and stakeholders to view what otherwise might be seen as fragmented efforts as part of a comprehensive, intentional approach to workforce preparation programming. This initiative is changing the way people think about their Extension work, creating energy and enthusiasm, and creating a feeling that educators are contributing to something larger than their local work.

Focusing on an issue like workforce preparation enabled us to make investments in certain areas, begin to show focused programming, and document impact. This meant devoting enough resources (new or redirected) to a new purpose and focus.

Our focus positioned us for increased external funding.

Building relationships and communicating with key stakeholders is important if you are aiming to change existing practices (e.g., paying teens, requesting change in grant making process). Our early success in redirecting resources and innovative practices would not have occurred without a solid foundation of communication with all stakeholders involved.

These recommendations should be considered by others who want to replicate our efforts.



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Key Outputs & Outcomes

Developing a Framework to Guide Programming and Priorities

- Researched the issue and gathered input from key stakeholders.
- Developed the *Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Overview* to provide a framework.
- Provided funding priority recommendations, guidance, and support to the Ohio 4-H Foundation.

Marketing Tools and Strategies

- Developed poster displays to raise awareness, give an overview, and roll out key strategies.
- Created and distributed key announcements, marketing information, and reports to raise awareness and make the case for workforce preparation.
- Planned and taught sessions to increase awareness about workforce preparation.

Programming Models, Curriculum, and Resources

- Developed a fact sheet *Skills for Success in the Knowledge Economy* and content for five action briefs/fact sheets (representing each component in the *Overview*).
- Developed tools for work-based learning program tools including how to work successfully with teen employees, a self-directed learning journal, and performance appraisals.
- Planned and implemented a new Workforce Preparation Day at the Ohio State Fair where participants demonstrated the knowledge and skills they have gained through 4-H that will make them more successful employees.
- Included a "Career and Workforce Preparation" Track within the 2007 Ohio Teen Conference, involving at least 50 teens in each session.
- Planned and implemented an Extension internship pilot program for college students working in local Extension offices.
- Developed content for three national conference presentations and a journal article.

Training

- Implemented a training for 18 Extension professionals using blended e-learning methodologies to raise knowledge and understanding about workforce preparation in the knowledge economy.
- Conducted trainings with teachers and Extension professionals on youth financial literacy issues and the *Real Money, Real World* curriculum. These trainings should reach well over 500 teachers and Extension professionals.

"With youth, technology is the primary way to communicate, and it is important to educate youth on how to use these technology tools in a productive and positive way."

4-H Educator



Evaluation Tools and Strategies

- Three specific program evaluation efforts are underway as a result of this project:
 1. A statewide evaluation of the *Real Money, Real World* program has documented that participation significantly raises awareness about financial management topics and motivates intentions to change behavior.
 2. Two work-based learning programs utilized a common evaluation strategy and tools including self-assessments by participants as well as performance appraisals by participants and supervisors
 3. An evaluation of workforce skill development through the 4-H club experience.

Funding

- Developed an external grant proposal which was selected for funding. Two members of our team received a \$10,000 grant to write a publication for practitioners addressing workforce preparation in the context of youth development programs.
- Received an invitation to submit a proposal for additional funding that would support financial literacy programming.

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