



2007 NAE4-HA

Poster Session

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Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative: Preparing Youth for Success in the 21st Century

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The poster session outline and key references are included on the following pages. Electronic versions of the poster, poster handout, *Workforce Preparation Initiative Status Report*, and supporting resources can be found at <http://www.ohio4h.org/workforceprep/>.

For a more information on the Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative, please contact Graham Cochran (cochran.99@cfaes.osu.edu or 614.688.4246) or Tricia Callahan (callahan.149@cfaes.osu.edu or 937.440.3945).

Poster Session Proposal Outline

Program Description

Ohio State University Extension recently identified the “Knowledge Economy” and “Enhancing Ohio’s Educational Capacity” as important areas of focus. Also, a report from Battelle Memorial Institute makes the case for Ohio 4-H being important to individual development and creating an engaged and knowledgeable workforce. In support of these areas, the Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative was developed to strengthen and expand programs that are developing job skills for youth. A Workforce Preparation Team was assembled to lead the initiative, research the issue, and gather input from key stakeholders from within our organization, other public agencies, and the private sector. As a result, our team developed the *Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Overview*, which includes a brief introduction to the issue, key skills youth need, important foundations, and key components of programming.

The *Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Overview* was designed as a guide for Extension professionals to align their work and program planning with exciting opportunities for Extension to be a leader in Workforce Preparation. This guide introduces the current concerns about employees entering the workforce with a lack of skills needed for success in workplace and what is known about twenty-first century skills. The workforce preparation components described are situated in the context of best practices in positive youth development and the understanding that youth are developing applied skills such as communication, teamwork, and decision-making as well as subject matter/technical skills through their 4-H experience. The programming components, adapted from the National 4-H Council’s Workforce Preparation Model (1993), are broad and include opportunities for work with citizens from pre-school through adults in career awareness and exploration, skill building, work-based learning, post-secondary internships, and adult development and learning.

In late 2006, our team used materials developed to guide investment of Ohio 4-H Foundation funds designated for Workforce Preparation Programming. A request for applications, grant guidelines, and evaluation plans were developed to support the initiative. During 2007, our team will be focused on providing strategies, resources, and evaluation tools to those interested in workforce preparation.

Research Base

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, but the skills emphasized in schools have not changed at the same pace (Levy & Murnane, 2006; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003). Thus, there is widespread concern that youth lack the skills essential for job success and are entering the workplace unprepared (Business-Higher Education Forum, 2003; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

The SCANS Report (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) identified key competencies employers want students to have (SCANS, 1991). After fifteen years, the same report is still being used to identify employability skills. In a review of SCANS and current Ohio Department of Education reports, these skills are described as managing resources, working with others, using information, understanding systems, using technology, and planning and managing a career. This aligns well with what we hear from the business sector and youth development research, which identifies important applied skills such as leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, initiative, communication, and career planning (Business-Higher Education Forum, 2003; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003). Levy and Murnane (2006) summarize these twenty-first century skills as expert thinking and complex communication and provide a compelling argument for educators to focus on a this new level of skills. Those who don't graduate with skills in expert thinking and communication will be competing for service sector jobs, most of which don't pay enough to support a family (Levy and Murnane, 2006).

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 elsewhere, a look at the evaluation thus far of the larger Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative shows:

- ✓ **Our structure, the process, and how it unfolded was a key to success.** 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 were all important.
- ✓ **Using a model or framework laid the foundation for our work.** We developed working knowledge of the current research base and a model. 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 or the initiative serving 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 a feeling that educators are contributing to something larger than their local work.

- ✓ **Focus on an issue like Workforce Preparation** enabled us to make investments in certain areas, begin to show focused programming, document impact. This meant devoting enough resources (new or redirected) to a new purpose/focus.
- ✓ **Our focus positioned us for increased external funding.** We were ready when funding opportunities became available (e.g. funding for applied research and programming).
- ✓ **Decision to focus on a specific program or curriculum was positive.** Because of a good fit in the current literature and needs for youth in Ohio, our team decided that one focus area would be financial literacy using an existing Ohio 4-H curriculum.
- ✓ **Relationships and communication with key stakeholders is important if you are aiming to change existing practices** (e.g., paying teens, 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 similar efforts.

Key References

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