



Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Overview



The Situation and Opportunity

Preparing youth for the workforce is a major concern. Employers are reporting that young workers lack key skills and attributes necessary for success in today's workplace.^{1,2} Companies are asking for young adults who have applied skills in communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem solving.^{1,2} Extension's Knowledge Economy initiative has identified "Employment Success" as an area of focus because of the changing nature of the 21st century workplace.³

OSU Extension plays an important role in addressing this concern. Because of our focus on the development of practical life skills, it could be argued that 4-H has always prepared youth for the workforce, at least indirectly. A recent report from Battelle makes the case for 4-H as being important to individual development and creating an engaged and knowledgeable workforce for the 21st century.⁴ To be most effective, we need to intentionally link our work with young people to workforce preparation, then document and report impacts. Thus, the Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative has been created to strengthen and expand programs that are developing job skills in youth.

Key Skills & Competencies Youth Need

The SCANS Report (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills)⁵ identified key competencies employers want students to have. 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.^{1,2}

Foundations

The workforce preparation components described below are all part of a larger foundation of positive youth development. It should be recognized that in addition to components of workforce preparation programming, an intentional foundation of best practices in positive youth development is critical. High quality 4-H experiences incorporate the Eight Key Elements of Positive Youth Development.⁶ An important example is the presence of adults who engage youth as valued partners. Using the experiential learning model to design learning activities that are active, engaging, and include reflection is also an important part of positive youth development.

Life skill development is an outcome of involvement in the 4-H program, including all the 4-H program delivery methods. Youth are developing applied skills such as communication, teamwork, and decision-making as well as subject matter/technical skills through their 4-H experience.

Goal

Ohio youth will develop awareness and skills for career success through intentional workforce preparation experiences that include education, experience, and reflection.



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Components⁷

- **Career Awareness & Exploration** - Starting at an early age (pre-school), youth benefit from learning about careers and processing what they learn with adults. Younger youth are involved in learning through play and guided experiences. Older youth are involved in more in-depth exploration.
Strategies: Examples include experiential learning activities for preschoolers and in all 4-H delivery methods such as family activities, role playing, speakers, field trips, career days, project interest area exploration, and some programs using specific curricula like *Teen Leadership on the Job*, *Wild Over Work*, *Real Money*, *Real World*, and *Mini Society*.
- **Skill Development** – Building on a strong foundation of life skill development, youth build applied skills needed for the world of work such as communication, teamwork, and understanding systems, as well as learning entrepreneurial skills, how to prepare a resume, interview for a job, and manage resources.
Strategies: Examples include 4-H Club experiences in public speaking and working on committees, participating in programs like the 4-H & Junior Achievement Partner Program, *Mini Society*, *Buzz on Biz* and *Real Money*, *Real World*, or other experiential activities focused on SCANS skills⁵, resume, interview, application, and career planning.
- **Work-Based Learning** – Teens are involved in practical opportunities that integrate work and learning experiences. These are real-life experiences that are structured, supervised, and evaluated. They may be paid or unpaid experiences.
Strategies: Examples of work-based learning include camp counseling, summer employment experiences, CARTEENS, 4-H Ambassadors, and Junior Fair Board membership.
- **Post-Secondary Internships** – Adults apply knowledge and experiences in a career field through formal academic or technical training combined with professional work experience in an internship setting. Quality experiences, led by skilled mentors/supervisors make the work experience a learning experience. Internships may be for college credit, paid or unpaid.
Strategies: Work experiences for adults include roles on the OSU campus, in local Extension offices, or at 4-H camps as student workers, interns, and program assistants.
- **Adult Development and Leadership** – Adults as lifelong learners improve their own skills for the workplace and learn to better support youth in workforce preparation (as volunteers, parents, educators, mentors, and supervisors).
Strategies: Training for adults in personal development, parenting, club leadership, youth/adult partnerships, youth development, experiential learning, or other areas improves their own skills for career success and is critical for successfully supporting youth in workforce preparation.

Key References

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