Training As Perceived
By 4-H Leaders

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Volunteer adult 4-H leaders in Mississippi were asked to rank 25 training needs in order of importance. The top two needs chosen were (1) obtaining and keeping parent cooperation and (2) gaining information concerning awards. The importance leaders placed on these training needs was further examined in relation to three respondent characteristics: (1) number of training sessions attended, (2) number of years as a leader, and (3) race. A different ranking of needs resulted from each examination.

CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE, skills, and attitudes are necessary for serving effectively as a volunteer adult leader in the 4-H Club program. In few cases does an individual who assumes this role possess all these qualifications. When given the opportunity leaders themselves are among the first to recognize their inadequacies and express the desire for more training.[1] They have been found to approve of and respond to a program of guidance and inspiration.[2] They have even recommended additional training meetings.[3]

The task of training volunteer leaders for their work with 4-H Clubs falls to the 4-H agent and to the state staff. Assuming that these professionally trained persons are qualified to provide the necessary training, it is not always easy to know exactly what kinds of training are needed. Adding to the problem is the fact that learning

[1] See C. H. Umberger and M. H. Umberger, *Effective Leadership* (Manhattan: Kansas Extension Service, 1951).

[2] See William G. Marders, "Improving Training for Volunteer Local 4-H Leaders in California" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 1954).

[3] See Richard C. Lyon, "Survey of Training Needs of Illinois Local 4-H Club Leaders" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1958).

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the kinds of competencies and procedures required of a leader does not come in one short training experience. Establishing priorities also increases the difficulties of planning for training.

The felt training needs of volunteer leaders were investigated in this study. The purpose was to determine those needs and to rank them according to the relative importance assigned to them by Mississippi leaders. This study was done because the training problem became acute in 1965 when 4-H Clubs were completely removed from the public school system. Most of the state's clubs had been in schools and most had been served directly by 4-H agents from the county Extension Service. Volunteer leaders had been used only in limited ways, although their contribution to the program as a whole was considerable.

The need for more volunteer leaders became pressing when the clubs were removed from the school system. Coupled with the need for more leaders was the problem of providing the kind of training needed by the leaders in order to make the transition as smooth as possible.

METHODOLOGY

Names of 323 volunteer leaders in the state were drawn (a 25 per cent random sample). Of those drawn, 69 didn't respond to the mailed questionnaire—we did not have an adequate address for 19; 50 were no longer leaders. Of 218 questionnaires received, 201 were usable.

Data obtained were classified in four categories: (1) background information; (2) a list of items (training needs) generally thought to relate to competencies used by 4-H leaders in performing their duties; (3) methods used for training volunteer leaders; and (4) training meetings.

ANALYSIS

This report focuses primarily on the data concerned with training needed by leaders to perform their duties. Respondents were asked to identify areas in which they felt a need for training. They were to read through the list of 25 items and indicate the degree to which they felt a need for training in each area (much, some, little). Definitions were given for these terms (much, some, little), and numerical weights of 2, 1, and 0 respectively were assigned. These weights permitted computation of scores into assignment of ranks.

Tests of relationships were conducted between differential rank-

ing of training need items and certain respondent characteristics.

Although the sample was randomly drawn, a disproportionate number of females returned usable questionnaires. Only 19 per cent of the sample (38) were males. Males, however, were better educated: *37 per cent were college graduates as compared with 19 per cent of the females.*

There was little difference between men and women in terms of *years served as a leader; 40 per cent of the men and 38 per cent of* the women had been leaders less than one year. Thirty per cent of the women and 20 per cent of the men had served more than six years.

Among women leaders, 81 per cent had children who had been 4-H members; 70 per cent had children in 4-H at the time the study was conducted. Comparable percentages for men were 74 and 63.

Training Needs

The 25 training items are listed in Table 1 in order of importance

Table 1. Rank order of felt training needs of volunteer adult leaders.

Rank	Training item
1	How to obtain and keep parent cooperation
2	Available awards to 4-H members
3	Ways of giving recognition besides awards
4	How to fill out and use 4-H project records
5	Information on specific project work
6	How to use and work with junior leaders
7	Materials and helps available to 4-H leaders
8	How leaders should plan and organize their work
9	How to prepare a 4-H demonstration
10	How to give 4-H demonstrations
11	The needs and interests of youth
12	How to prepare and display exhibits
13	How activities & events help members develop
14	How to use awards and contests
15	How to plan the local club program
16	Duties of the 4-H leaders
17	What state, district & county events are held
18	Reporting local activity to county Ext. worker
19	Using parliamentary procedure
20	How to make farm and home visits
21	How to help members select projects
22	Purpose and place of project work in 4-H
23	How to conduct a local club meeting
24	Purpose of 4-H Club work
25	Duties of local club officers

is assigned by respondents. Leaders felt the greatest need in obtaining and keeping parent cooperation. This can probably be explained by two factors. First, 4-H Club work has been stressed as a "family affair." Second, prior to 1965, Mississippi volunteer leaders did not have to be concerned about parent cooperation because they did not have full responsibility for local clubs. After the 1965 movement of clubs out of the schools and into the communities the leaders were closer to the parents.

Information concerning available awards to 4-H members ranked second as a felt need. The high ranking of this item may show the need for consistency and uniformity in the various aspects of the 4-H program as reflected by the awards system. Closely related to the awarding of prizes are ways of providing recognition to 4-H members other than awards. This item ranked third as a training need.

"Purpose of 4-H Club work" ranked near the bottom of the list. Two main factors probably explain this low ranking. First, 4-H Club work in the state receives a great deal of publicity; it is portrayed as an activity that complements the home and the school in development of character. Second, the philosophy and purposes of 4-H Club work logically become part of the "pitch" used by Extension agents as they recruit volunteer leaders.

Tests of Relationships

Statistical tests were conducted using differential ranking of training needs as the dependent variable and several characteristics of the leaders as independent variables. One section of the questionnaire pertained to training meetings conducted by Extension agents for volunteer leaders. Respondents were asked to indicate the number of these meetings they had attended. The number of such meetings attended by respondents ranged from none through four, with 42 per cent indicating they had attended no training meetings during the previous year. This probably can be explained by two facts. First, 37 per cent of the respondents had been leaders for less than a year. Second, 4-H staffs were busy *planning* for leader training meetings under the new organization instead of *conducting* training meetings.

The number of meetings attended by the leaders had a significant relationship to their ranking of the 25 training items (see Table 2). Of the five training needs ranked highest by leaders who had attended no training meetings, three were among the top five of the needs identified by leaders who had attended one or more such meet-

ings. There was some evidence that those leaders who had attended one or more meetings were more aware of the need for assistance than those who had attended no meetings. Those who had participated in training identified (1) how to obtain and keep parent cooperation and (2) how to use junior leaders, in their five most acutely felt needs. Those who had not participated in training listed parent cooperation as second priority, but didn't rank help with junior leaders in their top five needs.

Table 2. Rank order of felt training needs by number of training meetings attended.

Training needs	Training meetings attended	
	None	1–4
How to obtain & keep parent cooperation	2	1
Available awards to 4-H members	1	3
Available materials & help for leaders	3	10
4-H projects record keeping	4	4
Information on specific project work	5	6
Giving recognition other than awards	6	2
Using junior leaders	9	5

A second look at ranking of training needs considered race. The sample was composed of 135 whites and 66 non-whites. Sex composition by race was almost identical, with approximately one-third of both male and female being non-white. A significant difference was found to exist between whites and non-whites in the rank assigned to the several training items (see Table 3). Non-white leaders were

Table 3. Rank order of felt training needs by race.

Training needs	Race	
	White	Non-white
Available awards to 4-H members	1	5
How to obtain and keep parent cooperation	2	1
Ways of giving recognition other than awards	3	3
4-H projects record keeping	4	7
How to use and work with junior leaders	5	9
Information on specific project work	8	2
Available materials and help for leaders	9	4

less concerned than white leaders about various awards available to 4-H members. The strongest need of the non-white group was the

same as that of the total sample—how to obtain and keep parent cooperation.

The purpose of 4-H Club work was ranked relatively low by those who had and had not participated in training as well as by whites and non-whites.

Thirty-seven per cent of the respondents had served as a leader for less than one year, 33 per cent had served 1-5 years, 15 per cent 6-10 years, and 15 per cent over 10 years. Leaders with 1-5 years experience were more concerned with the problem of personnel assistance than with technical aspects of their role. Their second and third most acutely felt needs pertained to parent cooperation and use of junior leaders. These were ranked second and eleventh for leaders with less than one year of experience, and first and eighth for leaders with more than 5 years experience (see Table 4).

Table 4. Rank order of felt training needs by number of years as a leader.

Training needs	Number of years as leader		
	Less than 1 year	1–5 years	More than 5 years
How to obtain & keep parent cooperation	2	2	1
Available awards to 4-H members	1	4	9
Giving recognition other than awards	5	1	2
4-H project record keeping	6	5	3
Information on specific project work	7	6	4
How to use & work with junior leaders	11	3	8
Available materials & helps for leaders	10	7	5
How to give 4-H demonstrations	3	14	12
How leaders should plan and organize their work	4	11	7

A more detailed study would very likely reveal other significant differences; education, for example, would probably affect the ranking of items. Funds and personnel did not permit all possible analyses that might appropriately be done.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted to determine the felt training needs of a sample of volunteer adult leaders in the 4-H Club program in Mississippi. Findings were based on data from 201 usable schedules re-

turned by 254 respondents from a state-wide random sample of 323 names.

Obtaining and keeping parent cooperation in 4-H Club work was the primary concern of respondents. Also ranking high on the list of felt training needs was the matter of awards and recognition. Leaders apparently felt that parental support and adequate incentive programs were essential to their work.

The basic purposes of 4-H Club work ranked very low as a felt need. Even when controls were utilized, this item ranked low. Either the leaders receive adequate training concerning these purposes, the program purposes are generally known throughout the state, or leaders do not recognize the value of such information.

Race, number of training meetings attended, and number of years of experience as a leader were related to rankings of training needs.

It may be concluded from this study that parental influence plays an important role in 4-H Club work. This suggests a need for state and county program leaders and planners to incorporate more information regarding the involvement of parents into their training programs for adult leaders.

Second, not all leaders perceive the same relative importance to training in the areas tested. Extension planners of training programs can use this fact to provide learning experiences which will satisfy these varied leader needs. Some leaders may underestimate their abilities and knowledge. It is possible that they could perform at a much higher level if given adequate training. A main function of the training session may be to help these leaders recognize they are not as incapable or incompetent as they may feel.

Training for leadership functions may not be a simple process. Our present insights may be so limited that we do not recognize all the possible areas in which training may be important (the evidence we have is from leaders responding to training needs we suggest to them). It may be an error to assume that leaders recognize fully the areas in which they need training—especially if we take into consideration the limited experiences many have had upon which to base an expression of training needs. Effective training may require the best insights we can muster, both from evidence presently available and from insights additional study might provide.