efficiency in accountability

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With our 4-H enrollment rapidly increasing, we discovered that a lot of time was being lost keeping mailing lists and other records accurate. We selected two ways to help alleviate our problem: computerizing our traditional 4-H Club records and using a self-mailing reporting system for special interest groups.

As in any Extension program, funds were limited. So, we sought the computer help as a 4-H donation. After visiting various businesses that had been friends of 4-H, a small company donated its computer down time (computer time rented, but not used by the company), as well as its programming and key punching services.

4-H Club Records

We met with the company computer programmer and explained what services we needed. The number of services depends on how much the company is willing to donate. We asked for and received help with:

1. A statistical report to give us the information for our annual 4-H Youth Enrollment Report.
2. A local 4-H Club Membership Report for our staff and leaders' use.
3. A list of local 4-H leaders and junior leaders.
4. Mailing lists for county project workshops and/or gummed mailing label printouts.
5. Printouts that are simple and easy to read.

The information we provided the programmer was:

1. 4-H enrollment cards, as they came into our office.
2. Complete 4-H project listing.
3. Copy of the annual State 4-H Enrollment Report.
4. Local 4-H Club Membership Report (initially to get the leader list started, then the computer printout is used).

The company programmed this material using the annual State 4-H Enrollment Report code letters. Here's our computer informational cycle to leaders:

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February 1: Organizational leaders get two copies of their member and leader lists to check for corrections. They send back one copy and keep one for their records. Master copies are kept in the county Extension office.

May 1: Organizational leaders receive two copies of final membership and leader lists. They check them for corrections and keep one copy for their use and send the final corrected copies to the county office.

June 1: With final corrected copies turned in a statistical printout is run. Numbers are simply transferred to the annual State 4-H Enrollment Report.

July 1: Organizational leaders receive two copies of member printout to check for achievement requirements. They keep a copy and return the other to the county office.

The benefits of this program are many and valuable:

1. An accurate, efficient method of accountability.
2. A tremendous timesaver for secretaries, 4-H leaders, and advisers.
3. An automatic county statistical study of enrollment for program planning.
4. Readily available information for planning new programs or coordinating 4-H leadership.
5. A printout of 4-H Fair Exhibitor sheets.
6. Instant mailing lists for National 4-H News, etc.

Self-Mailer Report

For special interest programs, we developed a simple self-mailer report form with the basic statistical information, a space for a short summary of activities, and evaluation. When a school 4-H program is finished, teachers fill them out, fold, and mail. At the time the annual State 4-H Youth Enrollment Report is compiled, we take the statistical printout on the traditional club program and add the totals from the special interest self-mailers. The enrollment report is done in a fraction of the time it took before these methods were implemented.

Keeping track of what you're doing shouldn't take time from doing. Efficient accountability methods, including the computer, must become vital resources if we're to continue to expand 4-H youth programs.