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## **Planning Aids: Tools to Ensure Volunteer and Event Successes**

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**Abstract:** A collection of "Volunteer Planning Aids" was developed to assist agents and volunteers in completing and conducting programs, events and activities. Planning Aids include step-by-step instructions with a timeline for each program, event, or activity. Extension professionals may download and tailor the generic Planning Aids to fit local needs. While Planning Aids may also be helpful to Extension professionals, their greatest value is in guiding volunteers successfully through complex or multi-faceted tasks. Constant supervision becomes unnecessary, and orienting volunteers to the full scope of their positions is easier when

Volunteer Planning Aids are utilized.

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## Introduction

Volunteers are the heart of the 4-H program. The involvement of volunteer leaders allows Extension professionals to multiply their efforts. Experienced volunteers can frequently facilitate events and complex or multi-faceted tasks when provided with the appropriate tools. However, volunteers who are put in the position of coordinating events or accomplishing tasks without adequate direction and support from the Extension professional may be unable to produce a step-by-step checklist to help the volunteer.

Inspired by a collection of "Job Aids" formerly included in the *4-H Agents' Handbook* at Purdue University (Barkman, 1990), the members of the University of Kentucky Volunteer Administration Academy agreed that a set of generic checklists for volunteers to use in conducting several universal programs and events could be an invaluable resource for Extension professionals and volunteers. "Volunteer Planning Aids" were created by teams of Extension agents with a broad range of experience and from a diverse group of county programs. The aids were then posted on the Kentucky 4-H Web site in a format that allows any Extension professional to select a useful planning aid for his or her county and adapt and personalize that information for local use.

The group's objective in creating the Volunteer Planning Aids was to allow volunteers to spend more time and energy *conducting* 4-H projects and programs, and less time having to plan the steps and cover all the bases involved in a particular task. In addition, as the group developed checklists for some tasks, it became clear that new Extension professionals or those offering a project or event for the first time could also greatly benefit from the steps outlined in each Planning Aid. When Volunteer Planning Aids are utilized, volunteers become more self-sufficient, allowing agents to devote greater time to program and volunteer development and administration, and less time on implementing and carrying out the minute details involved with executing most programs.

When Planning Aids are used in combination with well-crafted Position Descriptions, even novice volunteers should have a very clear picture of the goals of their volunteer positions and the steps they need to take in order to successfully achieve those goals. These tools, combined with a solid orientation for volunteers, lay the foundation for a strong volunteer-based 4-H program without requiring the Extension professional to spend an inordinate amount of time detailing the steps necessary to complete each local program, event, and activity.

## What Is a Volunteer Planning Aid?

- Serves as step-by-step checklists to conduct a successful program, event, or activity. Including what needs to be done when, created for tasks and events that may be used by either Extension professionals or volunteers.
- Provides detailed instructions for volunteers and 4-H Extension professionals.
- Includes a purpose and timeline for the particular program or event.
- Provides in a generic format that an Extension professional can easily adapt to meet local needs.

## The Advantages of Using Planning Aids

- Planning Aids break complex tasks down into manageable components and present steps in a simple format that is easy to read and understand.
- Planning Aids provide the volunteer administrator with a quick, visual way to ensure tasks are being completed. This can be considered part of the volunteers' supervision plan.
- Planning Aids serve as a reminder of tasks to be completed and provide a timeline detailing when these tasks should be done.
- Planning Aids are more cost effective than large workshops and education sessions.
- Planning Aids allow for the volunteer administrator to introduce new volunteers to significant parts of programs in the volunteer's initial volunteer recruitment packet. The Planning Aid thus becomes part the volunteer's orientation.
- Planning Aids allow volunteers to be independent in completing their tasks.
- Planning Aids boost a volunteer's confidence that he or she has done everything necessary to accomplish a task or conduct an event.
- Using the generic Planning Aids provided on the Web site allows an Extension professional to quickly tailor a Planning Aid that includes all the steps necessary to accomplish the local event.

## Using Planning Aids in Extension

Planning Aids can be used by Extension professionals to guide program and event planning, but they were primarily designed to help volunteers successfully conduct more complex programs, events, and activities.

When using Planning Aids with volunteers, Extension professionals should consider including relevant Planning Aids in the volunteer's recruitment packet (Culp, Aldenderfer, Allen, Fannin-Holliday, Ford, & Goodwin, 2006). This packet should include a position description, information about the Cooperative Extension Service at the local level and beyond, and the county and state 4-H programs, and a volunteer application. 4-H Extension professionals can also include Planning Aids in volunteer orientation. Planning Aids can also be given to volunteers on an as-needed basis, as particular events are being planned, or as volunteers offer their services to coordinate specific events or activities.

A well-designed collection of Planning Aids tailored for local programs can also be an excellent tool for quickly educating new 4-H Council and County Extension Council members about the breadth of the local 4-H program and the key roles volunteers play in it. The collection of Planning Aids can be found in the GEMS Toolbox, in the "Engage" drawer <<http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4h/oldsite/gems/engage.htm>>.

Planning Aids are an important tool for volunteers and Extension professionals alike. Volunteers and Extension professionals can easily overlook critical details when planning and preparing for events and activities in the everyday rush involved in conducting 4-H programs. Planning Aids are a physical reminder of all that needs to go into a particular event and can be a key to success for a 4-H event or activity. Used correctly, a simple checkmark can ease the minds of volunteers and Extension professionals concerned about accomplishing a big task. Planning Aids engage volunteers more fully, help to foster self-confidence and self-sufficiency, and provide visual evidence that the local 4-H program is heading for success, one step at a time.

## References

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