

Discover 4-H Clubs: The Essential Resource for 4-H

Abstract

Obstacles facing new 4-H volunteers include time constraints and difficulty finding project-specific information, resources, and opportunities available for club members. As a solution to these obstacles and an aid for assisting volunteers in becoming confident in delivering information to youth, content experts produced Discover 4-H Clubs, a collection of curriculum guides. Volunteers across the globe have taken advantage of this free online teaching tool. As new curriculum guides are developed, more information is made available to meet the needs of 4-H volunteers. In this article, implications for Extension are outlined, and a call to action is extended.

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Introduction

Volunteers not only are the heart of 4-H but also are vital in leading 4-H clubs and assisting youth in acquiring knowledge, building character, and developing life skills in a learn-by-doing environment (National 4-H Council, n.d.). Recruiting and retaining volunteers can be difficult due to volunteers' time constraints, lack of expertise with 4-H project topics, and lack of support and resources (White & Arnold, 2003). Research indicates that prepared lesson plans assist 4-H volunteers in becoming effective educators (Horton, 1991). In addition, the more support volunteers receive, the more likely they will be to continue to volunteer in the future (Hart, 2005).

New volunteers who are leading a project club for the first time can benefit from having access to a curriculum specifically designed for the 4-H club format. Use of planning aids allows volunteers to spend more time and energy conducting 4-H projects and less time planning (Culp et al., 2009).

The purpose of this article is to bring attention to a new tool that fills a need in 4-H. Extension personnel

can use this new resource to recruit 4-H volunteers, help them get started, and guide them to successful leadership of a 4-H club.

Overview

The Discover 4-H Clubs resource is a set of curriculum guides that introduce volunteers to 4-H and provide detailed instructions for starting a 4-H club. Precisely, the resource outlines project-specific club meeting plans featuring a do-reflect-apply format, provides information about 4-H, and refers volunteers to other opportunities in 4-H.

The Discover 4-H Clubs curriculum guides were created in response to a volunteer needs assessment that was conducted with 4-H faculty, staff, and volunteers in 2012 and 2013. The assessment revealed that volunteers often are overwhelmed by the demands of starting a club, finding resources and curricula, and teaching topics outside their areas of expertise. The need to simplify the process of starting and maintaining a 4-H club by providing easily accessible tools for 4-H volunteers was evident.

To meet this need, 4-H project-area content experts were recruited to create a library of free online curriculum guides that provide the information volunteers need to get started in 4-H. Each expert created a curriculum guide that included lessons and activities for six club meetings. In addition, Utah State University 4-H faculty provided overarching introductory and concluding pages for all guides, which contain club enrollment information, hands-on learning instruction, and other informative material. To ensure that content was relevant and research-based, each guide was submitted for blind review through the university's peer review system before it was made available online.

Reach

The Discover 4-H Clubs curriculum guides are free and can be downloaded from www.discover4h.org. Anyone wishing to download a guide must complete a simple informational survey, providing basic contact and intended audience information. The curriculum guide is then sent via email in a pdf format. Data from the download survey are used to track use of the Discover 4-H Clubs guides. Additionally, a short online survey is sent to all individuals who download curriculum guides to evaluate the outcomes and impacts of using them.

The response to the Discover 4-H Clubs guides has been overwhelmingly positive. As noted in Table 1, curriculum guides have been downloaded for use not only in the host state of Utah but also nationally and internationally. In addition to 4-H staff, 4-H volunteers, and those associated with 4-H military clubs, other groups are using this tool to teach youth. These diverse groups include child care organizations, church groups, afterschool programs, and other youth organizations.

Table 1.

Discover 4-H Clubs Curriculum Guides: Titles and Download Data

Discover 4-H Clubs curriculum guide	Downloads	No. of states	Foreign countries^a
Art of Math	409	41	CA, DE, GB, KN, NP
Beef	424	43	AU, CA, DE, GB, NP
Cake Decorating	980	48	CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, GE, JP,

			KN, NP
Citizenship	683	45	CA, DE, GB, NP, SG
Code	660	43	AR, CA, DE, GB, JP, NP
Craft Beading	566	43	CA, DE, GB, KN, NP
Crime & Spy Science	1,148	46	AR, CA, CN, DE, GB, GE, JP, NP, SG
Crochet	695	44	AR, CA, DE, GB, KN, NP
Dairy Heifer	279	39	CA, DE, GB, NP
Dogs	615	45	AR, CA, DE, GB, NP
Expressive Arts ^b	194	37	DE
Family History	403	39	DE, GB, KN, NP
Family Sciences ^b	838	45	CA, DE, GB, JP, KN, KR, NP, SG
Fitness	1,084	48	AR, CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, GE, IT, JP, KN, NP
Forces of Nature	913	47	AR, CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, GE, KN, NP
Geology	785	45	CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, GE, NP
Goats	461	43	CA, DE, GB, NP
Healthy Snacks	766	35	CA, DE, GB, JP, KN, NP
Horse First Aid	274	36	DE, GB, NP
Kitchen Science	1,328	49	CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, JP, KN, KR, NP
Money Mentors	835	48	CA, CN, DE, GB, GE, IT, JP, KN, NP, PR, SG
Paper Crafts	1,001	46	CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, GE, IT, KN, KR, NP
Photography	1,013	43	CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, GE, KN, NP
Planet Energy	730	47	AR, CA, CN, DE, GB, NP
Python Code	545	46	CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, NP, SG
Robotics	1,032	47	AR, CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, JP, KN, NP
Scratch Code	447	40	CA, DE, NP
Sewing	1,212	47	CA, DE, EU, GB, KN, NP

Sheep	490	43	CA, CN, DE, GB, NP
Shooting Sports	860	47	CA, CN, DE, GB, GE, NP
Spa & Relaxation	856	48	CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, IT, NP, SG
Swine	421	43	CA, DE, GB, NP
Theatre Arts	648	47	CA, CN, DE, EU, GB, GE, JP, KN, KR, NP
Totals	23,595	50	15

Note. Data are from October 2013 to January 2016.

^aForeign countries: Argentina (AR), Australia (AU), Canada (CA), China (CN), Germany (DE), U.S. military base in Europe (EU), United Kingdom (GB), Republic of Georgia (GE), Italy (IT), Japan (JP), St. Kitts/Nevis (KN), South Korea (KR), Nepal (NP), Puerto Rico (PR), and Singapore (SG). ^bIndicates a Cloverbud-specific curriculum; Cloverbud programs are for youth aged 8 and under.

Implications for Extension

The Discover 4-H Clubs resource is a tool that addresses barriers to volunteering and assists 4-H personnel in recruiting and supporting new volunteers. In addition, the curriculum guides are being used in many innovative ways. Using this tool can improve outcomes of local 4-H programs by increasing the number and quality of volunteer leaders and expanding the reach of 4-H to more youth.

Combating Barriers to Volunteering

A survey reported in the *Journal of Extension* indicated that 79% of people questioned said they would be more willing to volunteer if doing so did not take so much time (Hart, 2005). Each Discover 4-H Clubs curriculum guide is organized into six complete lessons, each lasting approximately 1 hr and requiring minimal preparation time. This design may appeal to the time-constrained or short-term volunteer. Additionally, with the Discover 4-H Clubs curriculum guides, a volunteer no longer needs to be an expert in a project area to run a club because the guides feature ready-made club meeting lessons and activities.

Recruiting and Supporting Volunteers

A potential volunteer is invited to join 4-H by participating in six club meetings using a Discover 4-H Clubs curriculum guide and then entering resulting projects in the local county fair. Potential volunteers are encouraged to invite one or two other volunteers to join them and to rotate oversight of club meetings. This approach makes 4-H less intimidating, and volunteers often are willing to take this structured step to becoming a volunteer leader.

Applying Innovative Applications

Each Discover 4-H Clubs curriculum guide includes everything a volunteer needs to run a successful 4-H program, including research-based subject material, objectives, lists of supplies needed, instructions for activities, and handouts. Also included are explanations of the 4-H program, motto, and pledge and a description of a typical club meeting.

4-H professionals are expanding use of the curriculum guides in many innovative ways. For example, they are using the guides as

- introductions to new project areas in existing clubs,
- afterschool program curricula,
- summer camp guides,
- resources for teen council activities,
- resources for regional and state event activities,
- curricula for teen teachers,
- materials for new leader orientation or training, and
- resources for school enrichment.

Call to Action

New Discover 4-H Clubs curriculum guides are continually being developed. For example, in-development curriculum guides include Child Care, Healthy Relationships, Horse Showmanship, Mountain Biking, Outdoor Skills, and Poultry Production as well as guides addressing several Cloverbud subjects.

Interested 4-H personnel are encouraged to use the curriculum guides with their volunteers and youth. In addition, individuals interested in contributing to curriculum guides in their areas of specialty are welcome to contact the lead author to discuss author collaboration opportunities.

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