



## Engaging Volunteers through ISOTURES: Identifying Opportunities for Volunteer Involvement<sup>1</sup>

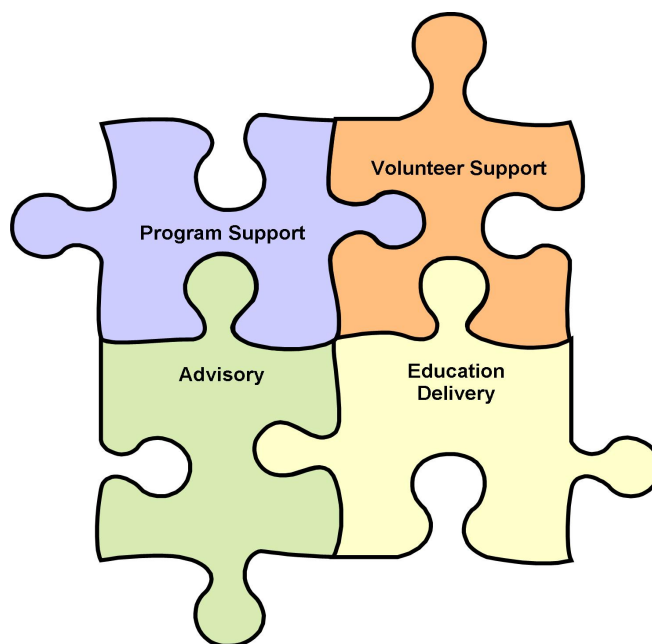
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### Overview

A key responsibility for Extension 4-H agents is to engage volunteers and expand their involvement in 4-H programs (Schmiesing & Safrit 2007). ISTOURES is a nationally recognized leadership model for volunteer development and leadership that encompasses the same concepts that would be used if a new employee was hired. Identifying opportunities for volunteer involvement is the first step in creating an effective volunteer system.

The role of a 4-H Agent in identifying opportunities for volunteer involvement was illustrated earlier with a puzzle. The square represents the overall goals and objectives of the Extension program.

The puzzle pieces represent the various educational activities and program tasks that need to be completed to achieve the goals and objectives of the county 4-H program (McCurley and Lynch, 2006). With respect to the volunteer life cycle, identifying opportunities for volunteers facilitates the determinants of volunteering (Bussell & Forbes, 2003).



**Figure 1.** Volunteer opportunities may include program support, volunteer support, education delivery, or service in an advisory capacity.

This article will address how to: (1) establish a mission and vision for the county 4-H program; (2) link volunteers to the mission and vision; (3) assess program needs for volunteers; (4) use an organization

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chart to illustrate the 4-H volunteer program vision; and (5) create an effective volunteer role description.

## Mission and Vision

What is the mission of the county 4-H program? What is the vision for what the county 4-H program will look like in three, five or seven years? How do volunteers fit into this vision? Knowing the answers to these questions is often the difference between having volunteers actively involved in the 4-H and volunteers that are less involved. Answers to these questions will:

1. Help a 4-H agent create opportunities for volunteers that expand the scope and impact.
2. Allows easy communication of the value of 4-H Youth Development with potential volunteers.

A mission statement of an organization is a short but complete description of the overall purpose and intentions of that organization. It states what is to be achieved, but not how this should be done. In Florida 4-H, the stated mission is:

*Florida 4-H creates supportive environments for diverse youth and adults to reach their fullest potential."*

A vision statement on the other hand outlines what 4-H wants to be. It focuses on tomorrow; it is inspirational; it provides clear decision-making criteria; and it is timeless. It is about what is wanted and does not focus on how. Here is an example:

*Florida 4-H aspires to be the leading youth development program that creates positive change in youth, families, and communities."*

The clear determination of what the county 4-H program does and where the program is heading is crucial in determining what volunteer roles are necessary and in showing volunteers why their services are needed. If a vision or mission has not yet been developed, it is important that this step be completed. If the mission or vision statements do not reflect volunteer involvement, maybe it is time to make adjustments and start linking volunteers to the county 4-H mission and vision.

Expanded volunteer involvement requires that county faculty, staff and volunteers be equally involved in planning, implementing and evaluating the county 4-H program. Earlier, it was stated that: (1) the mission and vision are key components of a well-planned county 4-H program; and (2) volunteers need to be reflected in the mission and vision of the county 4-H program. If this is true, then how does the program link these two together? There are several steps to linking volunteers to the core mission and vision of the county 4-H program and they are outlined here.

### Step 1. Put Together a Team

An important concept to remember is that the vision cannot be dictated from the top down. Current volunteers and other representative citizens must have a voice in determining where 4-H in your county is heading. The vision must be a shared expression of what the community wants 4-H to be, building on current successes, and the things that are valued. It must stretch beyond what is, to what could be. If key leaders are not easily identified, seek the advice of the Regional Specialized 4-H Agent (RSA) and State 4-H Specialist. At minimum, the team should include the following:

- County Extension Director
- 4-H Agent
- 4-H Staff
- Adult volunteers
- Youth
- Key community collaborators (if possible)

### Step 2. Develop a Plan

Prior to meeting with your team, it is a good idea to have an understanding all aspects of guiding the mission and visioning process. Have a discussion with the Regional Specialized 4-H Agent (RSA) and State 4-H Specialist. They are experts in volunteer systems and will provide resources and support the initiative. After meeting with the RSA and State Specialist make an appointment with the County Extension Director (CED). It is important that the

CED is aware of the initiative and agrees to support and participate in the process. An excellent resource to understand the team approach concept is Our Volunteer Program: The Management TEAM Approach to Enhancing Volunteer Programs by Betty Stallings (available at [http://pdec.ifas.ufl.edu/foci/upload/OUR\\_Volunteer\\_Program.pdf](http://pdec.ifas.ufl.edu/foci/upload/OUR_Volunteer_Program.pdf)).

### Step 3. Create the Mission and Vision

After steps one and two are complete, assemble the team and start the process. This will most likely include more than one meeting or workshop and should address the following points:

- Developing a clear concise mission statement.
- Build a vision for the 4-H program by focusing on wants and not how to get there. Express in the present "we are" rather than "we will be."
- Keep it short and simple.
- If the vision does not "stretch" the current program it will not lead to change.
- Language in the present adds the needed pressure for action, so it does not get put off for 10 more years.
- Determine what opportunities will be provided to youth (ie. clubs, special interest groups, 4-H in the Classroom, project education, judging programs, fairs, etc.).
- How many youth will be served by the program in each delivery mode?
- How will short, intermediate and long-term volunteers support each delivery mode?
- How will short-, intermediate-, and long-term volunteers provide indirect program support and middle management?

Once a shared mission and vision has been established, it is time to link volunteers. The next section will outline a strategy to accomplish that task.

## Linking Volunteers to the Mission and Vision of the County 4-H Program

Recall that the mission establishes the purpose of the county 4-H program and the vision describes what it will look like. An important process in any volunteer system is linking volunteers to the mission and vision. This is the process that brings the concepts of mission and vision together, where their very definition informs action, thus allowing them to be measured and analyzed for continuous improvement. This is key if vision is to become reality.

### Moving from Current Reality to the Vision

Organizational assessment and environmental scanning are two important concepts for making the vision reality. The leadership team, working together, critically assesses the current state of the program—the number of youth being served, the number of youth and adult volunteers providing direct service to youth, the number of youth and adult volunteers in indirect program support and middle-management roles, etc. This is then compared to the vision established earlier. The result will be a gap between reality and vision. The goal is to close the gap. The more the gap is filled, the more the vision turns to reality.

An environmental scan is useful in identifying external factors that may impact the vision. This might include number of schools in the county, economics, such as unemployment, and sources of potential volunteers. The purpose here is to brainstorm and identify as many external factors that might impact the vision of the program. How to deal with external factors is not as important at this moment and will be dealt with later.

This section is not intended to provide a complete explanation of how to conduct a needs assessment or an environmental scan. Rather it is meant to bring about awareness. The RSA, State Specialist, and Volunteer Focus Team can assist in this process.

## Organizational Charts

An organizational chart is a useful tool for visualizing how paid and volunteers will be involved in achieving the vision. It provides communication for each member of the 4-H program whether paid or volunteers by showing who they report to for questions and assistance. Failing to provide a communication strategy will force all questions to go through the 4-H agent increasing your workload. It may be a single organizational chart that shows all delivery modes and support functions or it may be an organizational chart for each delivery mode and support function. Samples are available to assist.

Understanding how to create an organizational chart is not important at this point; assistance can be provided, but it is important that 4-H agents recognize that it takes many involved people to accomplish the vision. The more people involved increases the number of questions. A good organizational chart will help direct paid staff and volunteers to the appropriate person to answer these questions. Again, the RSA and State Specialist can help the team develop and organizational chart.

## Volunteer Role Descriptions

Volunteer Role Descriptions are an important tool in successful volunteer systems. Why? Volunteer role descriptions help define what help is needed; together with what set of skills are necessary to complete the role successfully. Additionally, volunteer role descriptions describe what a potential volunteer will do, why it is important and for how long. These are questions a potential volunteer will have. Being prepared in advance will help in the recruitment process. Partnerships with volunteers occur when the interests, skills, and abilities of a potential volunteer match a need in the 4-H program. A role description increases the likelihood of a successful volunteer partnership. Table 1 presents the top ten reasons for using a role description.

## Conclusion

Expanding volunteer involvement can be an effective strategy in meeting the goals and objectives of an Extension program. To do so, understand and incorporate a mission and vision statement into the county 4-H program. Ensure that current volunteers and other representative citizens have a voice in determining where 4-H in your county is heading. Link volunteers to the mission and vision by conducting needs assessments and environmental scans. Utilize an organizational chart to visualize the vision. Finally, develop volunteer role descriptions for efficiency and effectiveness.

## References

Bussell, H. & Forbes, D. (2003). The Volunteer Life Cycle: a marketing model for volunteering. *Voluntary Action*, 5(3), pp. 61–79.

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Table 1.

10.	Volunteers want to know the time commitment.
9.	Volunteers want to know what is expected.
8.	Volunteers want to know why the role is important to the youth in 4-H.
7.	Volunteer role descriptions improve communication between paid staff and volunteers.
6.	It is not possible to know each time an opportunity to recruit a volunteer will present itself. Volunteer role descriptions describe what is needed in the 4-H program and where to match a potential volunteer with an opportunity.
5.	New and existing volunteers will not wait around for something to do. Always have opportunities available for volunteers.
4.	Busy people will volunteer, but busy people will not do busy work. Role descriptions eliminate busy work by adding meaning to the volunteer role.
3.	Volunteer role descriptions help recruit the right person for the right role.
2.	The right person for the right role reduces workload for 4-H agents.
1.	Volunteer role descriptions improve communication with your CED.