

*OHIO 4-H VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION  
IN AREA 19 (MORGAN, MUSKINGUM, PERRY, AND  
WASHINGTON COUNTIES)*

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# **Abstract**

*Ohio 4-H Volunteer Recruitment and Retention in Area 19 (Morgan, Muskingum, Perry, and Washington Counties)*

By Lydia R. Flores

Ohio 4-H relies on volunteer efforts to drive youth development programs. The success of the Ohio 4-H program depends on effective volunteer recruitment and retention strategies. This project's purpose was to identify the factors that influence individuals to become a 4-H volunteer and to leave the program within the volunteer role. Results indicated that adults become 4-H volunteers to help youth develop life-long skills like leadership but feel unsupported and disconnected. Affiliation motives influence individuals to become 4-H volunteers, while program and personal factors influence a volunteer's decision to leave the program.

## **Section 1 – Introduction**

### **Need for Volunteer Recruitment and Retention**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, youth and adult volunteer numbers for the Ohio 4-H program dropped by 19.8%, and 66.3% of that loss was from adult volunteers (Impact Report, 2020). There was an additional 18.6% decrease in volunteer numbers for the Ohio 4-H program in 2021, with 31% being adult volunteers (Impact Report, 2021). However, it is unknown if the pandemic was the primary cause for volunteer loss. There may be other factors that were compounded prior to the crisis. This project sought to identify causes in the drop in adult volunteers in the Ohio 4-H program of Area 19 (Morgan, Muskingum, Perry, and Washington Counties), so that 4-

H professionals may adjust their county programs to increase volunteer numbers and retain volunteers to sustain the program.

## **Background**

Many non-profit organizations often rely on volunteer efforts for handling day-to-day tasks, raising funds, and running the organization (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2005). According to a 2018 report from AmeriCorps, volunteering in America had reached a record high with 77.34 million adults choosing to volunteer nearly 6.9 billion hours, worth an estimated \$167 billion in economic value (Warfield, 2018). In 2019, Ohio 4-H had about 16,100 adult volunteers to help lead and support 171,983 youth (Impact Report, 2019). Considering the dollar value of a volunteer's time being \$28.54 per hour (Independent Sector, 2021) and volunteers, on average, give nine hours per month (University of Minnesota Extension, 2019), Ohio 4-H volunteers provide an annual contribution of their time worth over \$4 million. The valuable service provided by volunteers benefits the youth in the program by helping them learn new skills, build confidence, and become true leaders (University of Minnesota Extension, 2019).

According to the job description of an Ohio State University (OSU) 4-H Extension Educator, 20 percent of program efforts should be focused on implementing and supporting a comprehensive volunteer management system through identification, selection, orientation, training, utilizing, recognizing, and evaluating adult and youth volunteers. One study indicates that there are three primary reasons adults become 4-H volunteers: to benefit their community, they liked helping people, and they liked mentoring youth (Payne, 2011).

Studies have indicated effective recruitment techniques to meet the needs of 4-H volunteers, and recruitment efforts will be vital in rebuilding volunteer numbers for the 4-H program, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, factors that influenced a volunteer's decision to leave need to be determined to provide direction in programming efforts for 4-H professionals. This project aimed to understand some of those factors in the study area. Though this is localized and not generalizable to the entire state, other 4-H professionals may gain insight or ideas about how to retain volunteers in their area.

### **Review of Literature**

There has been a lack in research conducted on motivation, recruitment, and retention of Ohio 4-H volunteers, and one study conducted using 4-H volunteers from the North Central Region (includes Ohio) dates back to 2012. Since Ohio 4-H is a part of Ohio State University Extension, constant development and research is necessary to remain relevant to the community. Therefore, factors that influence a volunteer's decision to leave the program need to be determined to provide direction in programming efforts for 4-H professionals. It is important to discover what causes them to leave so we can address those issues before they become a factor.

A structured review of literature included only articles that met the following criteria: (a) represented an empirical study published in a peer-reviewed journal and (b) analyzed volunteer motives, recruitment, or retention as dependent variables. Articles dating beyond 10 years were included because of their relevance to the research topic. "The essence of volunteer-based organizations is that they lack administrative structure, and therefore must be studied in their existing states" (Romney, 2016, p. 6).

## **Volunteer Motivation**

The common variable in many volunteer studies is motivation. “All of these studies support McClelland’s theory of motivation, which claims people are driven by the need for power, achievement, and affiliation” (Schrock et al., 2013, p. 2). Those who are driven by achievement tend to set attainable goals for themselves and their work. However, 4-H professionals typically arrange award banquets to provide public recognition for their volunteers, an achievement motive (Culp, III & Schwartz, 1999). Individuals driven by affiliation value relationships and have a need to obtain approval from others. Those who are motivated by the need for power generally have a desire for influence and authority. Culp and Schwartz (1999) found that 4-H volunteers were motivated by affiliation with either the 4-H organization or 4-H members.

Affiliation motives were the driving force for volunteers to begin or continue their service to 4-H. Culp and Schwartz (1999) found the top five negative motivators to be: physical impairment/death, feeling unneeded, program/philosophy change in 4-H, lack of time, and family members no longer involved. These negative motivators influenced a volunteer’s decision to discontinue their service. Therefore, lack of recognition is not an issue, but rather, unfulfilled affiliation motives are the primary reason for eventual discontinuation of service as a 4-H volunteer (Culp, III & Schwartz, 1999).

“Understanding the motivations of the volunteers who participate can allow the educators to effectively communicate with their volunteers” (Schrock et al., 2013, p. 6). Communication is important for relationships. Effective communication provides volunteers with confidence and builds trust among them and the 4-H organization.

Effective communication includes explaining volunteer expectations and sharing the benefits of volunteering within the 4-H program.

### **Volunteer Recruitment**

To successfully recruit 4-H volunteers, 4-H professionals should focus on 4-H's positive name recognition, the volunteer's personal interaction with 4-H members and other adults, and the opportunity to contribute to the community (Culp, III & Schwartz, 1999). Schrock et al. (2013) suggest finding volunteers by setting up a fun, interactive activity for them, observing their interactions, and then discussing if affiliation and/or achievement needs can be met through the volunteer opportunity provided. Smith et al. (2004) suggested that targeted volunteer recruitment holds strong for all types of volunteer managers looking to increase both the scope of their programs and the efficiency of their outreach efforts. Targeted volunteer recruitment focuses on current volunteers within the organization, determines why they volunteer, and then uses the knowledge gained to recruit new volunteers.

Therefore, volunteer recruitment starts with current volunteers by understanding their background and demographics. Some individuals may have specific skills or expertise to be utilized within the county 4-H program. The approach for Smith et al. (2004) was to gather information from the volunteers who lead types of 4-H projects, specifically natural resources projects. Ninety-five percent of these volunteers were parents, and 68 percent of them had children in 4-H, but only 12 percent of volunteers had a degree in natural resources (Smith et al., 2004). When the volunteers were asked about who would make good volunteers for 4-H natural resources projects, their

responses similar to like the perceptions given by 4-H professionals; however, the volunteers had mentioned industry people as possible volunteers.

Important motivators for volunteers leading 4-H projects were seeing the youth develop and self-improvement opportunities. Regarding attracting new volunteers, the main method suggested by current volunteers was better and increased advertising about the specific 4-H projects (Smith et al., 2004). The study suggested that finding volunteers might involve a hierarchical approach, by targeting the 4-H parents first. Most of the volunteers already have children involved in 4-H. Discussing the opportunity with them, gauging their interests, and directly asking for their help could have a huge impact on their decision.

### **Volunteer Retention**

To meet youth development needs, Extension must not only recruit but also retain its volunteers (Terry et al., 2013). The study conducted by Terry et al. (2013) reported the decision to volunteer has similar motivations to the consumer's decision to purchase a good or service. An increase in volunteer retention can be attributed to understanding elements of two behaviors: loyalty and satisfaction (Terry et al., 2013). Organizational climate can have a major influence on the volunteer experience, which ultimately establishes satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the experience. There is a relationship between volunteer retention, the organization climate of the county program, and the benefits received from involvement as a volunteer. A volunteer is looking for a well-led, inclusive, and harmonious organization to donate their time and resources to (Terry et al., 2013).



Volunteer loyalty relies on the perceived quality of service provided to the volunteers. Loyalty is only one way to identify satisfaction and is acquired over time based on experience and perceived quality of service. Extension professionals must recognize that volunteers are consumers of volunteer opportunities and shift their focus to increasing volunteer satisfaction, and satisfaction can be encouraged by involving loyal volunteers in the recruitment process (Terry et al., 2013). Other ways to increase volunteer satisfaction are to continuously communicate the significant role volunteers have for the 4-H youth, provide new and challenging opportunities, and ensure that new and existing volunteers feel accepted by all Extension staff in the office (Terry et al., 2013).

Ohio 4-H is built on a foundation of creating belonging, understanding, and achievement for the youth members, but currently, these elements are not a part of the volunteer development program.

### **Importance/Significance of this Project**

This research will help 4-H professionals understand reasons for volunteer departures so that they may then create new resources that will increase volunteer retention. Subsequently, they may also discover ideas to make volunteering for 4-H easier and create opportunities for future volunteers. This research study will also help identify and ultimately eliminate obstacles for volunteer involvement in the Ohio 4-H program. Practical applications from this study will benefit participants directly and indirectly in the future. Current volunteers who participate in this study may see direct improvements made to the 4-H program based upon their responses, and incoming program participants will enter an altered program based upon the results of this study.

## **Objectives/Procedures**

This project identified factors that influence OSU Extension Area 19's 4-H volunteer recruitment and retention and provided 4-H professionals with an informational graphic that summarizes the research data to help address the needs of their volunteers in their county 4-H program. This project was guided by the following objectives:

1. Identify factors that motivate individuals to initially become a 4-H volunteer, factors that cause volunteers to continue in their role, and factors that influence volunteers to leave the program.
2. Develop a printed 4-H volunteer recruitment and retention resource for 4-H professionals to examine the needs and limitations of the volunteers in their county program.

This qualitative study will use descriptive research. A survey instrument was used to collect data to evaluate the research objectives. The survey allowed the researcher to determine characteristics of volunteers and to summarize their opinions or attitudes toward their role as a 4-H volunteer. The survey instrument identified potential factors that influence Area 19 4-H volunteers to join the program and factors that affect their decision to leave the program.

## **Section 2 – Procedures**

### **Population and Sample**

The survey was administered through Qualtrics software and distributed to the population of Ohio 4-H volunteers in Area 19 (Morgan, Muskingum, Perry, and

Washington Counties) via email. The sample population contained 477 email addresses of Ohio 4-H volunteers in Area 19, which were obtained through the Ohio 4-H State Office using the 4-H online database. The sample includes new volunteers (1-2 years of service), current volunteers (at least 3 years of service and still active), and former volunteers (no longer active). Volunteers were asked to take part in this study because of their important role as an Ohio 4-H volunteer.

Depending on the type of volunteer they served as for Ohio 4-H, their roles varied between club, project, program, or camp volunteers. Club volunteers serve as advisors for a local 4-H club, which comprises of multiple 4-H members. Each county differs in the number of 4-H clubs available to 4-H members. Program volunteers are affiliated with 4-H within a specific program. For example, a county may have a junior gardening or horse-riding therapy program with adult volunteers that help plan and facilitate the program. Project volunteers are trained or experienced for a specific project area. For example, a county may offer shooting sports projects, which requires adult volunteers to maintain safety of youth and teach youth how to use a gun for sport.

If they agreed to be in this research study, they were expected to complete this 5-minute online survey. They could only complete the survey once. Volunteers were not asked to participate in any follow-up questionnaires. Volunteers were encouraged to submit a response for the success of the study to make improvements within their county 4-H program. Participation in this research study was entirely voluntary. Volunteers may have refused to participate or withdrawn at any time without consequences or loss of benefits. Also, volunteers may have been withdrawn from this study without their consent by the investigator.

## **Data Collection Process**

The survey instrument (Appendices iii) was designed by the researcher and reviewed for viability by three experienced members of the Volunteerism and Community Club design team, a group of OSU Extension 4-H educators. An invitational email was created explaining the purpose of the study to obtain an informed consent from the volunteer. After two weeks from the initial invitation (Appendices ii), a reminder email with the survey link was sent. Then a second and final email reminder was sent to those who have not responded the day before the survey closed.

The online survey was set to anonymize responses which means it would not track the respondents' IP Address, location data, and contact information. The only volunteer identifiers on the survey were age, years of service, and role as a volunteer. The same invitational email was sent to the Area 19 4-H Extension professionals with a request that they encourage volunteers in their counties to participate in the study that was emailed to them to help reduce missed emails, as they will be able to reach volunteers who do not actively check their emails or 4-H Online.

## **Analyses Procedures**

Qualitative responses were analyzed by the researcher using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This method of data analysis goes beyond summarizing the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between two levels of themes: semantic and latent. Semantic themes are explicit to what the participant said or wrote, and the researcher does not go beyond surface meanings (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Latent themes identify or examine underlining ideas that theorize the semantic content of the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This study analyzed the participants' responses to form latent themes for the data.

After responses were analyzed, factors that influence 4-H volunteers to join and leave the program were categorized into themes. These categories were used to design an informational graphic, a resource for 4-H Extension professionals, to suggest the necessary improvements to benefit volunteer recruitment and retention for the county 4-H program. Since I, the researcher, hold a position as a 4-H professional in Ohio 4-H, I have experience working with adult volunteers in the county 4-H program. Therefore, I could interpret the responses from volunteers from a program standpoint.

## **Section 3 – Project Content**

### **Findings**

From the sample population, there was a total of 473 emails sent of the 477 with three bounced emails and one reported as spam. There were 120 responses of the 473 possible, or a 25.4% response rate after removing two incomplete responses and five responses that declined to participate. There were ten responses from new volunteers (1-2 years and still active) that ranged from 31 to 45 years old with 80% of them being club volunteers, 10% program volunteers, and 10% project volunteers (Tables 1 and 2).

There were 106 responses from current volunteers (3 years or more and still active) with a higher trend of volunteers in their 30's and 40's and a spike in those 61-65 years old (Table 6). There were 11 different combinations of volunteer roles, but a majority (85.8%) of respondents indicated they serve a club volunteer (Table 7). Lastly, there were four responses from former volunteers (no longer active) that varied among

age, but half of those respondents were in their 60's (Table 13). Two respondents indicated they served as a club volunteer, one served as a camp volunteer, and one served as a project volunteer (Table 14).

Every respondent, regardless of their years of service, was asked what motivated them to become a 4-H volunteer. All responses were categorized into three themes: previous experience, advising youth, and assisting the program (Table 16). The major motivational factor at 76.2% was previous experience, which referenced the volunteer was involved in 4-H as a youth and/or their child(ren) are involved. The theme advising youth accounted for 13.5% of responses, which indicated helping/working with youth and their projects in a leadership role. The last 10.3% was represented by the theme assisting the program where respondents referenced that there was either need with a project area/club, they worked for the program/extension, or they are an advocate for agriculture. Many responses included multiple motivational factors that were categorized separately.

### **New Volunteer Data**

New volunteers were asked what their experience has been like during their 1-2 years of service. The responses were categorized into three themes: positive, borderline, and negative (Table 3). Most respondents (61.5%) indicated they have had a positive experience, and respondents referenced that they have loved helping others, working with youth, and are looking forward to next year. The theme borderline accounted for 23.1% of responses, which stated their experience was fine or a learning experience. The last 15.4% of responses represent the negative theme and indicated

that their experience was not always good with other volunteers/parents or that it was overwhelming/not enough volunteers to help.

New volunteers were then asked if their experience as a 4-H volunteer had matched their expectations. Again, the responses were categorized into three themes: positive, borderline, and negative (Table 4). Most respondents (66.7%) indicated that yes, their experience has matched their expectations. Some responses (22.2%) stated that their experience potentially matched their expectations or that this question was difficult to answer due to the global pandemic. Lastly, for those respondents (11.1%) that stated their experience has not matched their expectations, which was due to hoping for more help from other volunteers/extension office.

Lastly, new volunteers were asked if they would continue as a 4-H volunteer and why or why not (Table 5). All respondents (100%) indicated yes; they would continue as a 4-H volunteer. Equal parts (28.6%) indicated they would continue as a 4-H volunteer because they enjoy working with youth, want to advocate for agriculture/livestock, and to benefit the community. The last 14.2% indicated they would continue as a 4-H volunteer as long as their child(ren) were involved in 4-H.

### **Current and Former Volunteer Data**

Current and former volunteers were asked what organizational issues they faced as a 4-H volunteer. These responses were categorized into four themes: none, personal life, relationships, and program management (Table 8). Some respondents (20%) simply stated none. Responses that represented personal life (20%) indicated there was not enough time or they were too busy with other commitments. Program management represented 25% of responses, which referenced too much paperwork/requirements to

complete as a volunteer or inadequate locations/spaces for meetings/programs. Many respondents (35%) indicated relationships were the organizational issues they faced as a 4-H volunteer. This included lack of energy, too much responsibility, unfair treatment, need for recruitment, or other volunteers undermining decisions.

Current and former volunteers were then asked what factors influenced them to continue as a 4-H volunteer. These responses were categorized into three themes: relationship development, program impact, and leadership responsibility (Table 9). Most respondents (70%) indicated relationship development factors influenced them to continue as a 4-H volunteers, which includes other volunteers, families/child(ren), youth succeeding/learning, or community benefit. Program impact represents 23.8% of responses with belief in the traditional program, accommodations set for youth, or there was a need for help that influenced them to continue as a 4-H volunteer. The last 6.2% of responses indicated factors that influenced them to continue as a 4-H volunteers involved their leadership abilities, enjoying their role as a leader, or overcoming challenges they faced within their role.

Current and former volunteers were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the 4-H program. These responses were categorized into themes based upon their responses (Tables 10 and 11). There were respondents (6.9%) that stated either none or not applicable. The strengths corresponded with positive remarks which represented 46.9% of responses. There were themes such as inclusive, teamwork, great office/educator, variety of opportunities, flexibility, and commissioner support, but many responses surrounded youth development/leadership skills gained by 4-H members. The weaknesses corresponded with negative remarks, which accounted for



46.2% of responses. There were five themes developed from these responses: technology, program concerns, cost, relationships, and personal conflicts. The theme of technology included difficulty using technology and 4-H being in a virtual format because of COVID-19. The program concerns included statements about the 4-H program having too many rules/requirements, too much paperwork, and driven by political agendas. Cost specifically mentioned camp and project books being too expensive for members and families. The theme of relationships included interpersonal situations, poor marketing, and volunteer burnout. Lastly, personal conflict statements surrounded time commitments, program traditions, and low participation from members.

Lastly, current and former volunteers were asked what factors would influence their decision to leave the program. The responses were categorized into three themes: none, personal, and program (Tables 12 and 15). There were some respondents (9.8%) that simply stated not applicable, or they do not plan to leave anytime soon. A majority of responses (55.4% for current volunteers and 60% for former volunteers) corresponded with personal factors that would influence their decision to leave the program. For current volunteers, there were several reasons shared which included child(ren) age out/no longer involved, schedule responsibilities, old age/physical health, family/parent issues, or enjoy/just watch. For former volunteers, their personal factors included career needs/commitments, mental health, or age. The last theme, program factors, was represented by 34.8% of current volunteers and 40% of former volunteers. Current volunteers stated reasons like OSU requirements/COVID restrictions, poor leadership, more volunteer responsibility, no 4-H camp, or lack of communication/youth involvement. Former volunteers indicated poor leadership or OSU

requirements/restrictions were factors that influenced their decision to leave the program.

The timing of this research study was relevant to the data collected from volunteers. Factors that could influence a volunteer to decide to leave the program are still lingering within the Ohio 4-H program. The volunteers specifically mentioned the COVID-19 restrictions which seem to be reduced this upcoming program year just two after 2020. Other factors like increased volunteer responsibility, lack of communication, and poor leadership can be addressed within the next year to improve the county 4-H program and encourage volunteers to stay with Ohio 4-H.

## **Discussion and Implications**

### **Volunteer Motivation**

There were many similarities found between this research project results and results of other volunteer motivation studies. McClelland's theory of motivation (Schrock et al., 2013), which claims people are driven by the need for power, achievement, and affiliation, was represented in this research project. 4-H volunteers are driven by affiliation motives, and unfulfilled affiliation motives appear to be the primary reason for eventual discontinuation of service as a 4-H volunteer. Schrock et al. (2013) suggest finding volunteers by setting up a fun, interactive activity for them, observing their interactions, and then discussing if affiliation and/or achievement needs can be met through the volunteer opportunity provided.

Since there was such a large representation of volunteers with previous experience in this research, marketing the volunteer role to give back to their community and program that contributed to their growth and development would generate interest

from potential volunteers. There is potential for future projects to be developed to assist in volunteer training and engagement. A reflective activity where adults list the skills they learned through 4-H and how can those skills address current community needs would help illustrate how their help as a volunteer could impact the program and community. This could help satisfy the adults motivated by affiliation. An activity that designs a timeframe for project or club goals would allow for adults to see how they can help youth achieve success. This could help satisfy the adults motivated by achievement. Even though many studies do not support power driven volunteers, there could be an activity for adults to create a program or process for other volunteers or youth. Discussing the opportunity with them, gauging their interests, and directly asking for their help could have a huge impact on their decision to join, stay or leave.

### **Volunteer Retention**

Ohio 4-H is built on a foundation of creating belonging, understanding, and achievement for the youth members, but currently, these elements are not a part of the volunteer development program. There is a relationship between volunteer retention and the organization climate of the county program, and the benefits received from involvement as a volunteer. Extension professionals must recognize that volunteers are consumers of volunteer opportunities.

Extension professionals should focus on increasing volunteer satisfaction, which can be bolstered by involving loyal volunteers in the recruitment process. These loyal volunteers are aware of the project areas/clubs that need help in the program. They would be able to advocate for those needs at a recruitment event which also adds a personal touch and makes the ask of help from others more relatable.

## **Relationship Development**

Based on the concerns shared by Area 19 volunteers, the main area of focus to help retain 4-H volunteers is relationship development. Study findings provided information that indicated that these could be broken down into at least three concepts: conflict management, emotional intelligence, and communication. There were concerns of not being able to handle situations with families/parents and other volunteers.

There are assessments available to determine conflict management styles and how to handle certain conflict situations based on your style. Volunteer training could also include team building activities which would allow volunteers to problem solve together with no attention given to current conflicting views.

Effective communication skill building is crucial for volunteers' satisfaction in their role. However, communication is a two-way street. Therefore, not only is it important for them to communicate effectively, but it is important for Extension professionals to communicate effectively and in a variety of methods.

An activity on communication methods could help volunteers see the differences in how they share information and how they receive information. For Extension professionals, it is important to be aware of the communication barriers their volunteers face and find mutual accommodations for those volunteers.

Barriers for Area 19 specifically include low to no access to internet and cellphone service. Therefore, online communication is limited for many volunteers. In addition, the postal service in Area 19 has worsen with major delays in delivering

newsletters in an adequate amount of time. Many volunteers received April newsletters in May or June.

Emotional intelligence would help volunteers build skills of self-awareness by understanding, using, and managing their emotions. Again, there are assessments available to determine their level of emotional intelligence which could help them identify areas for improvement to ease the stress of their volunteer role, communicate effectively, empathize for others, and overcome conflicts. Volunteer training could also incorporate an activity to help build emotional intelligence skills.

### **Program Changes**

The Ohio 4-H Volunteerism and Community Club design team will align with the Volunteer Research Knowledge Competency (VRKC) (Ohio 4-H Volunteerism and Community Club Design Team, 2020). The National 4-H Council identified the VRKC, a list of the six core competencies (Figure 1), two of which must be covered each year. The topics underneath each corresponding competency may be taught at the discretion of the 4-H Extension Professional (Figure 2). The Volunteerism and Community Club design team will identify the two competencies to be covered on an annual basis.

### **Conclusions**

This project's purpose was to identify the factors that influence individuals to become a 4-H volunteer and to leave the program within the volunteer role. Results indicated that adults become 4-H volunteers to help youth develop life-long skills like leadership but feel unsupported and disconnected. The improvements to be made to the Ohio 4-H volunteer experience should address the needs of all volunteers to be confident, comfortable, and capable to move the program forward for years to come.

However, research should be replicated in other county areas to identify any other needs or concerns of 4-H volunteers.

4-H professionals should focus on volunteer orientation and satisfaction.

Volunteer orientation is where effective communication and expectations are initially established, but the program must grow and adapt with its volunteers. Situations change with each individual and create barriers that limit or inhibit a volunteer's willingness or ability to continue to their service. It is our hope that the printed 4-H volunteer recruitment and retention resource will educate and encourage 4-H professionals to refocus their volunteer training and management efforts to a more supportive and interactive program.

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## Appendices

### i. Informational Letter

Greetings Ohio 4-H Volunteer,

My name is Lydia Flores, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Agricultural Communications, Education, and Leadership at the Ohio State University. I am conducting a research study called Ohio 4-H Volunteers Recruitment and Retention in Area 19 (Muskingum, Morgan, Perry, and Washington Counties). You have been asked to take part in this study because of your important role as an Ohio 4-H volunteer.

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Your participation is voluntary. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether to participate.

This project intends to identify factors that influence OSU Extension Area 19's 4-H volunteer recruitment and retention and provide 4-H professionals with resource to help address the needs of their volunteers in their county 4-H program.

This qualitative study will use descriptive research. A survey instrument will be used to collect data to evaluate the research questions. The survey instrument will be used to identify potential factors that influence Area 19 4-H volunteers to join the program and factors that affect their decision to leave the program.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University and the Ohio 4-H program. If you agree to be in this research study, you will be expected to complete a 5-minute online survey. You will only complete the survey once.

The survey has already been reviewed by an expert panel for validity. You will not be asked to participate in any follow-up questionnaires. Your response is crucial to the success of the study. We will work to make sure that no one sees your online responses without approval. Since we are using the Internet, there is a chance that someone could access your online responses without permission. In some cases, this information could be used to identify you.

Also, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- Authorized Ohio State University staff not involved in the study may be aware that you are participating in a research study and have access to your information; and



- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Your de-identified information may be used or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent. You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By agreeing to participate, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study. This study has been determined Exempt from IRB review. For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Lydia Flores at [flores.191@osu.edu](mailto:flores.191@osu.edu) or the advisor overseeing the research project, Dr. Specht at [specht.21@osu.edu](mailto:specht.21@osu.edu). For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251 or [hsconcerns@osu.edu](mailto:hsconcerns@osu.edu).

I have read (or someone has read to me) this page, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am not giving up any legal rights by agreeing to participate. To print or save a copy of this page, select the print button on your web browser.

## **ii. Email Invitation**

Dear Ohio 4-H Volunteer,

You serve important roles in clubs, camp, school activities, and other community events. To “Make the Best Better”, I am conducting research on the Ohio 4-H volunteer program and would like your feedback given the role you serve as a volunteer.

My name is Lydia Flores, a graduate student in the Department of Agricultural Communications, Education, and Leadership (ACEL) in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) at the Ohio State University (OSU), and I am conducting this research study to determine why volunteers join the program, why they continue to be involved, and the barriers that may cease their involvement.

The link below will direct you to an anonymous, online survey that will gather information about motivations related to recruitment and retention. Participation in this research study is completely voluntary and all information you provide will be held as confidential as possible.

The survey should only take about 5 minutes to complete, and you can stop at any time. Your response is crucial to the success of the study. You may skip any question you are not comfortable answering. Survey results will be reported in a summary format and

individual responses will not be identifiable. There is no penalty, and no services will be withheld if you choose not to participate.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this study. **Please complete the survey by 11:59pm EST on Friday, February 4, 2022.** For questions or technical issues, you may contact me at [flores.191@osu.edu](mailto:flores.191@osu.edu) or by phone at 740-252-5430.

***Please do not forward this message or share this link with others; all Ohio 4-H volunteers invited to participate in this research study will receive their own link.***

Sincerely,  
Lydia Flores  
ACEL Graduate Student

### iii. Survey Instrument

#### Volunteer Information

1. Volunteer age...
  - 18-25
  - 26-30
  - 31-35
  - 36-40
  - 41-45
  - 46-50
  - 51-55
  - 56-60
  - 61-65
  - 66-70
  - 71-75
  - 76-80
  - 81+
  - I prefer not to answer
2. Volunteer years of service...
  - 1-2 and still active
  - 3+ and still active
  - Former volunteer (no longer active)
    - How many years did you serve as a volunteer?
3. What is or was your volunteer role within the 4-H program? (Select all that apply)
  - Camp Volunteer (adult volunteer or camp nurse)
  - Program Volunteer (4-H Advisory committee, food and/or fashion board, riding
  - therapy, etc.)

- Club Volunteer (cloverbud leader, project leader, resource volunteer, or organizational club leader)
  - Project Volunteer (livestock, woodworking, STEM, etc.)
4. The number of hours donated per month for 4-H in your volunteer role...
- 1-2
  - 3-4
  - 5-10
  - 11-15
  - 16-20
  - More than 20

**Volunteer Questions** (depending on their response to the above question #2)

- For those that selected 1-2 years of service...
  1. What motivated you to become a 4-H volunteer?
  2. What has the experience been like as a new 4-H volunteer?
  3. Has the experience as a new 4-H volunteer fit your expectations?
  4. Do you plan to continue as a volunteer? Why or why not?
  5. Any additional comments for the Ohio 4-H program?
- For those that selected 3+ and still active...
  1. What motivated you to become a 4-H volunteer?
  2. What organizational issues do you currently face as a 4-H volunteer?
  3. What influences you to continue as a 4-H volunteer?
  4. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the 4-H program?
  5. If you decide to leave the 4-H program, what factors might influence your decision?
  6. Any additional comments for the Ohio 4-H program?
- For those that selected former volunteer (no longer active) ...
  1. What motivated you to become a 4-H volunteer?
  2. What organizational issues did you face as a 4-H volunteer?
  3. What influenced you to continue as a 4-H volunteer?
  4. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the 4-H program?
  5. Since you are no longer with the 4-H program, what factors influenced your decision to leave?
  6. Any additional comments for the Ohio 4-H program?

**Closing**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this volunteer survey for my research study. The findings from the study will be highly practical for the Ohio 4-H programs in OSU Extension's Area 19 (Morgan, Muskingum, Perry, and Washington Counties). I aim to use the findings to support my colleagues in recruitment and retention of 4-H volunteers for their county programs as well as my own. Practical applications from this study will benefit participants directly and indirectly in the future.

## List of Tables and Figures

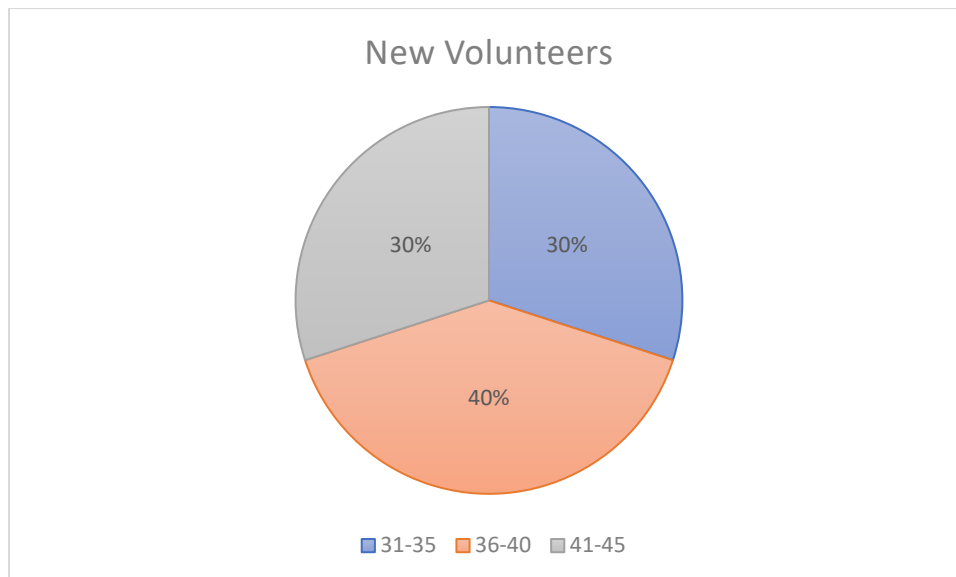


Table 1: New volunteer (1-2 years of service) age demographics

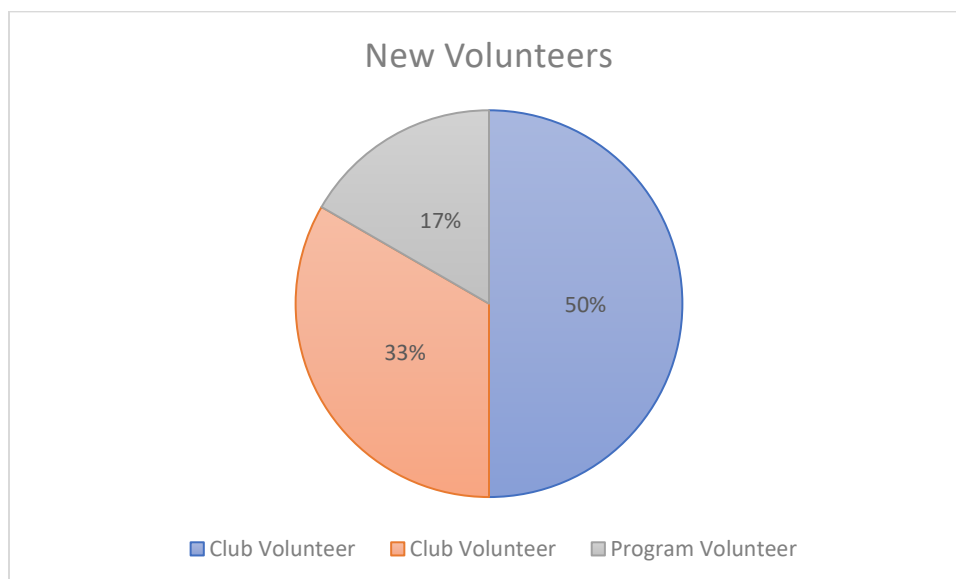


Table 2: New volunteer (1-2 years of service) role distribution

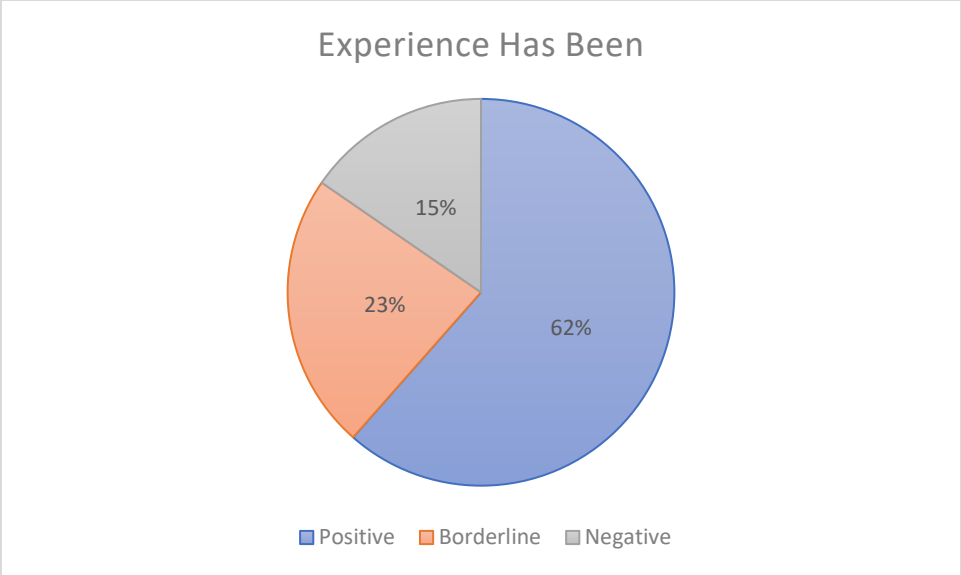


Table 3: New volunteer (1-2 years of service) experience has been like

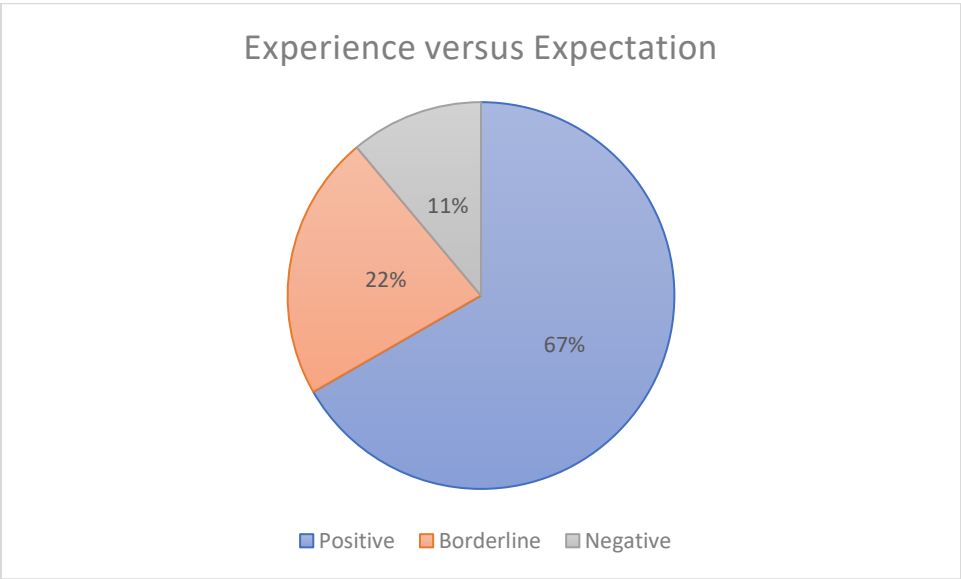
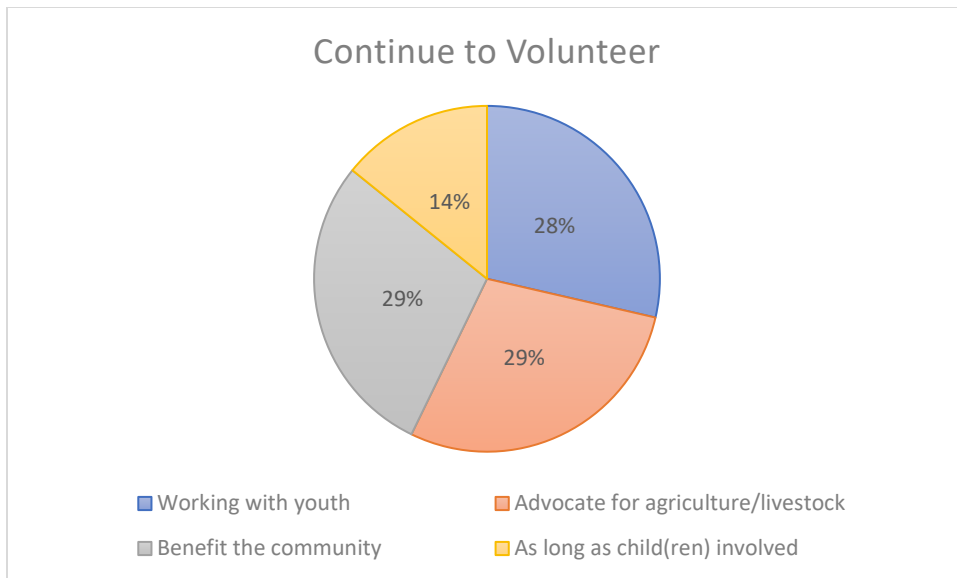
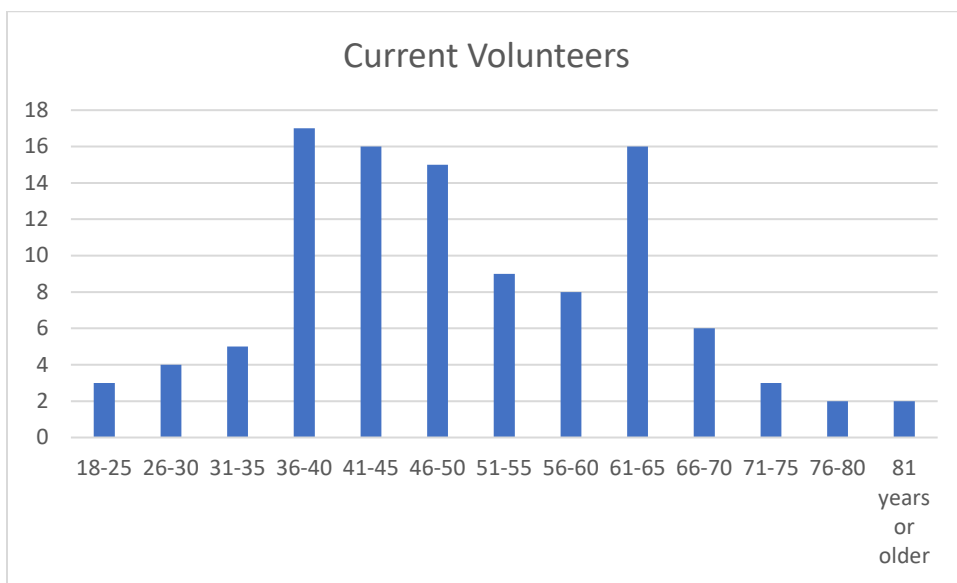


Table 4: New volunteer (1-2 years of service) experience compared to expectation



**Table 5: New volunteer (1-2 years of service) motivation to continue as a 4-H volunteer**



**Table 6: Current volunteer (3 or more years of service and still active) age demographics**

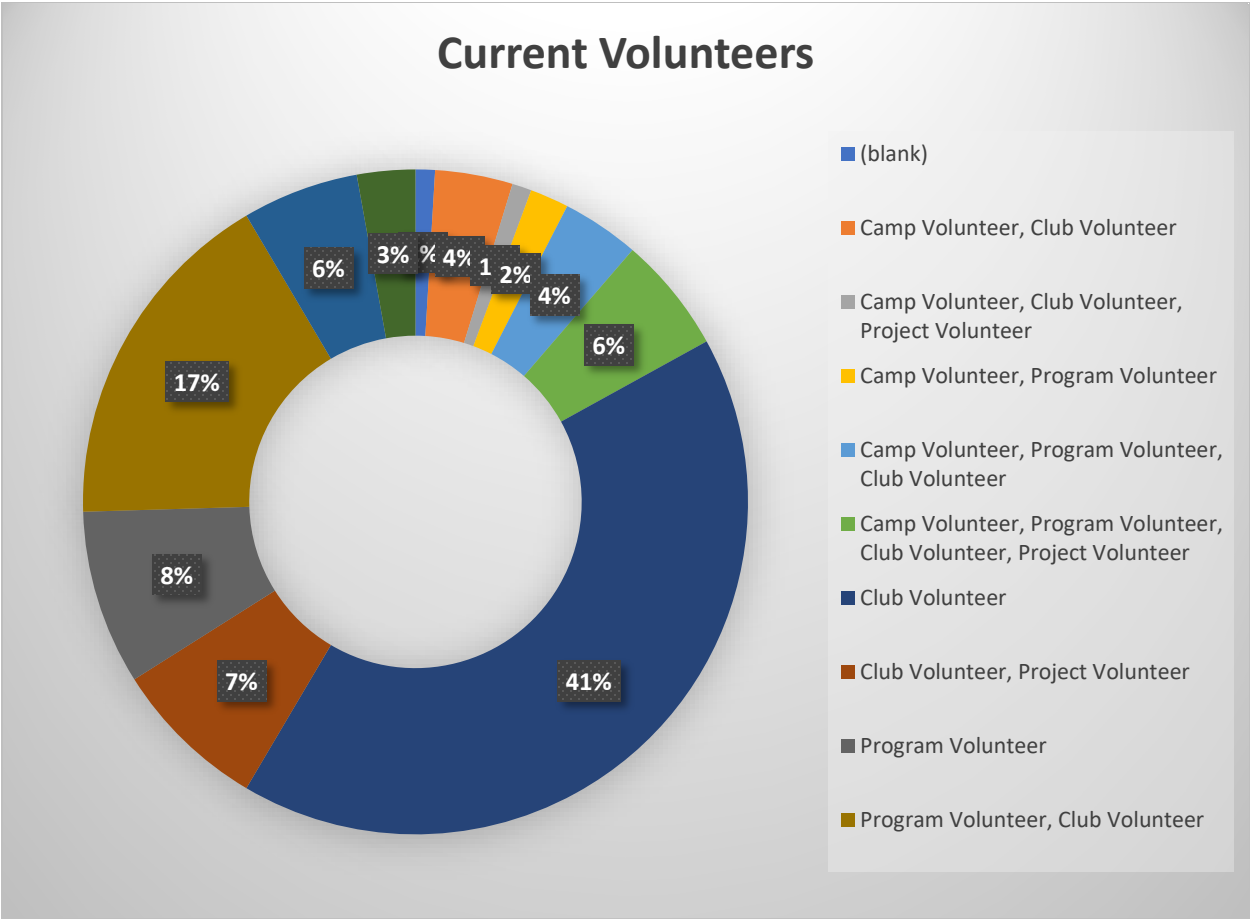


Table 7: Current volunteer (3 or more years of service and still active) role distribution

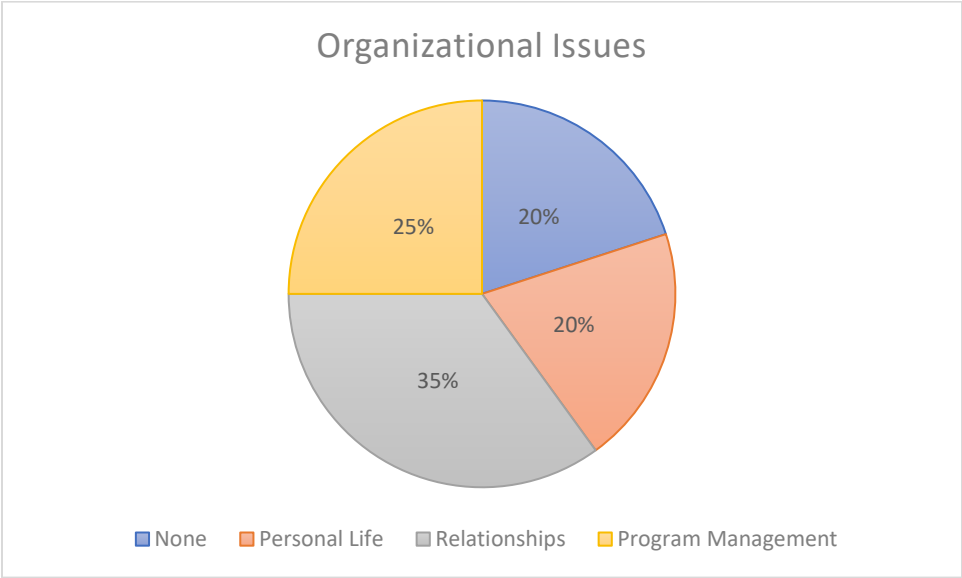


Table 8: Current (3 or more years of service and still active) and former (no longer a volunteer) volunteer identified organizational issues they faced as 4-H volunteers

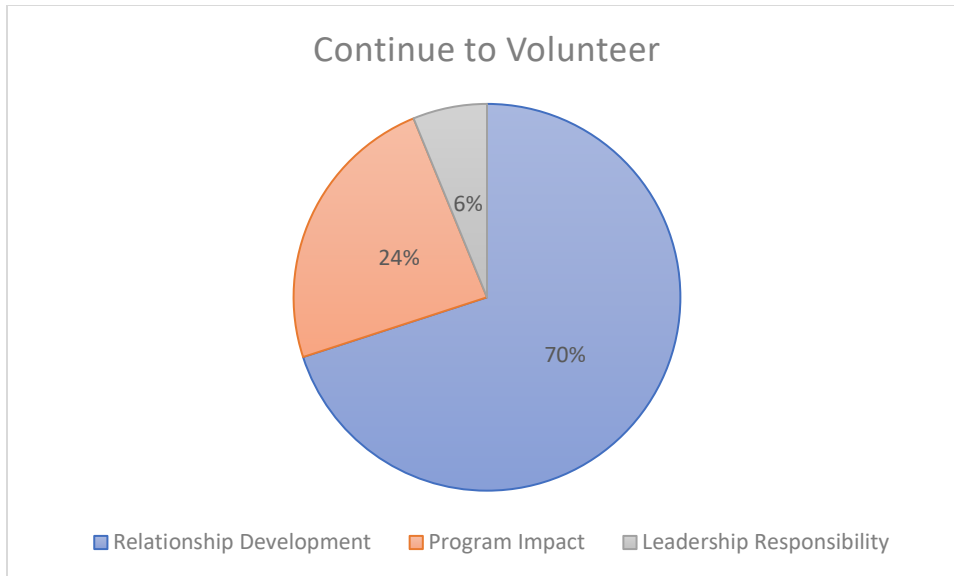


Table 9: Current (3 or more years of service and still active) and former (no longer a volunteer) volunteer motivational factors to continue as a 4-H volunteer

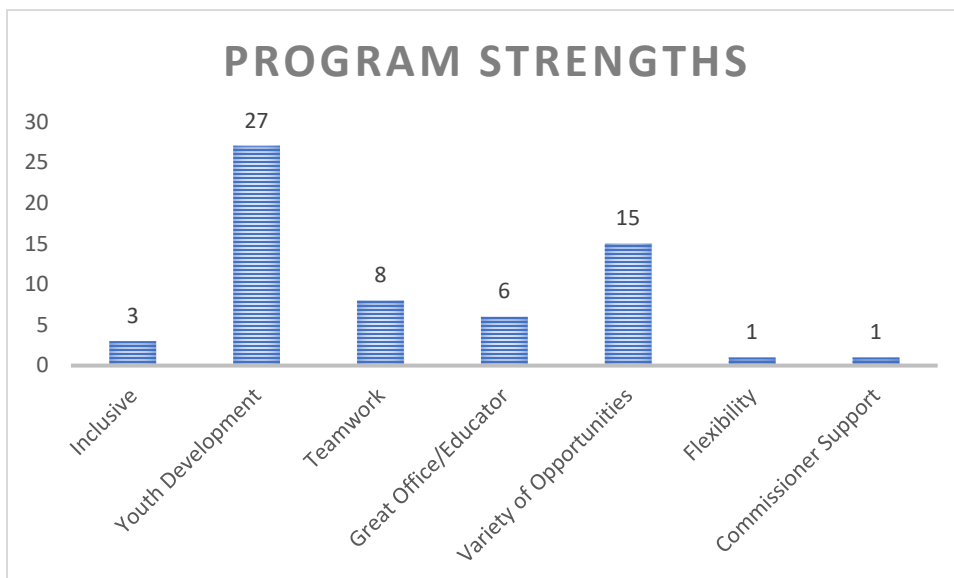


Table 10: Current (3 or more years of service and still active) and former (no longer a volunteer) volunteer identified 4-H program strengths



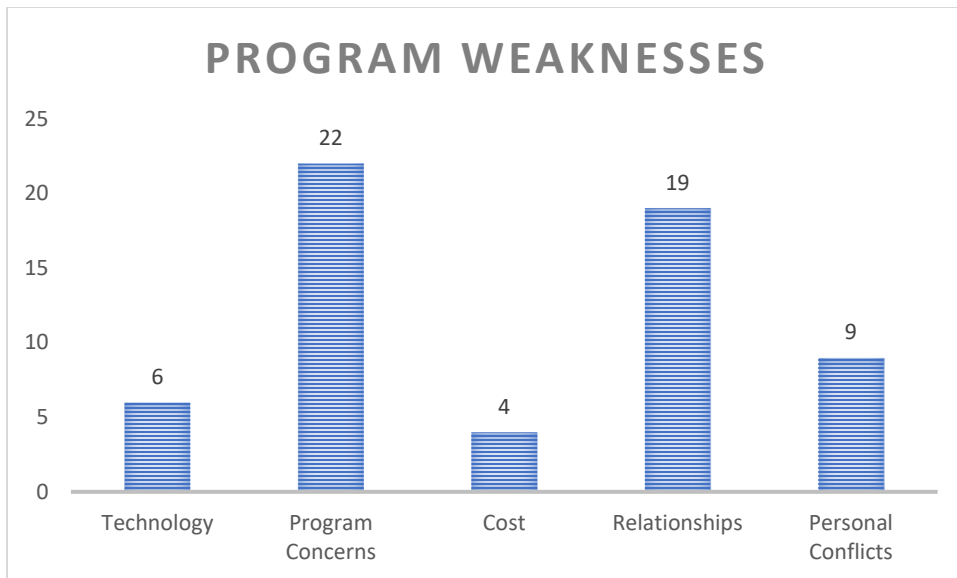


Table 11: Current (3 or more years of service and still active) and former (no longer a volunteer) volunteer identified 4-H program weaknesses

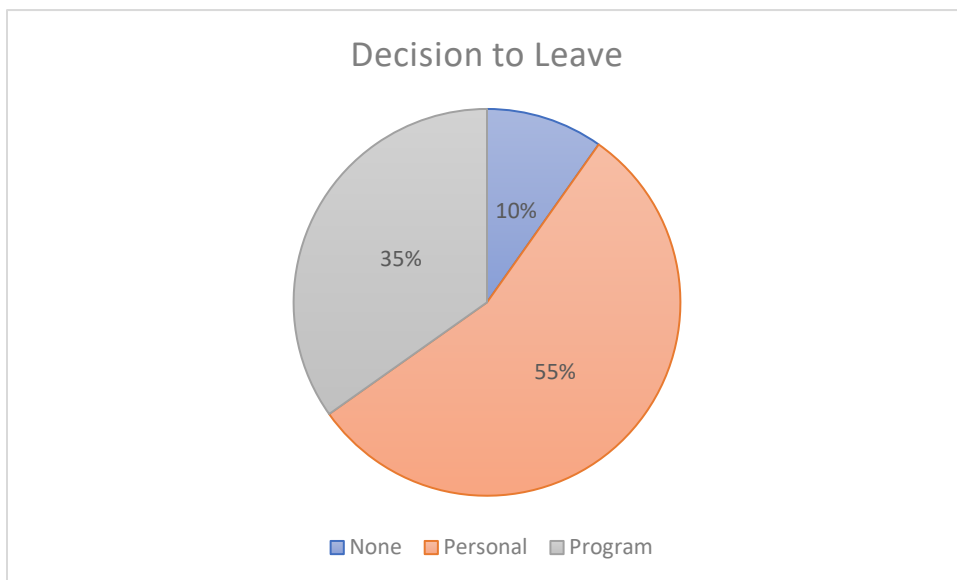


Table 12: Current (3 or more years of service and still active) volunteer identified factors that would influence their decision to leave the 4-H program

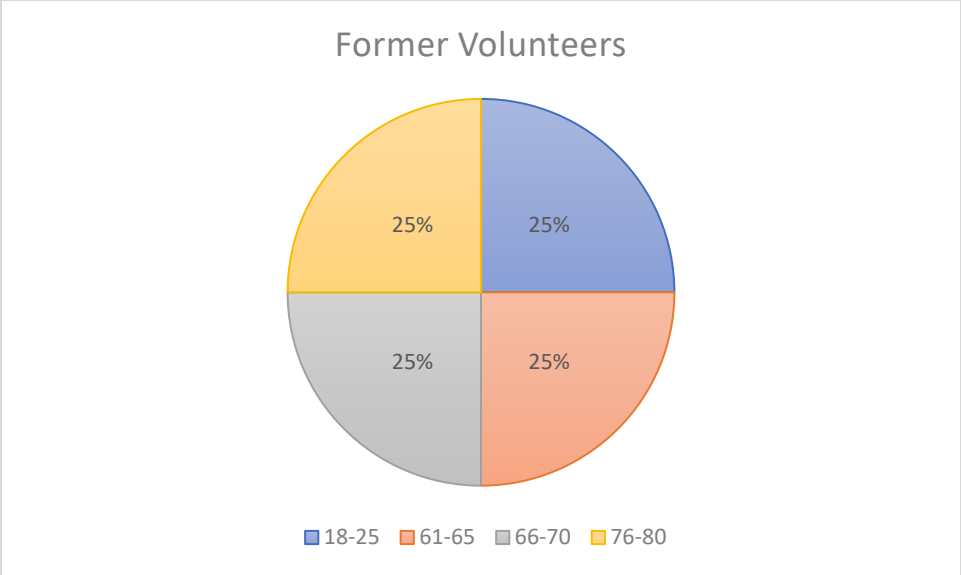


Table 13: Former (no longer a volunteer) volunteer age demographics

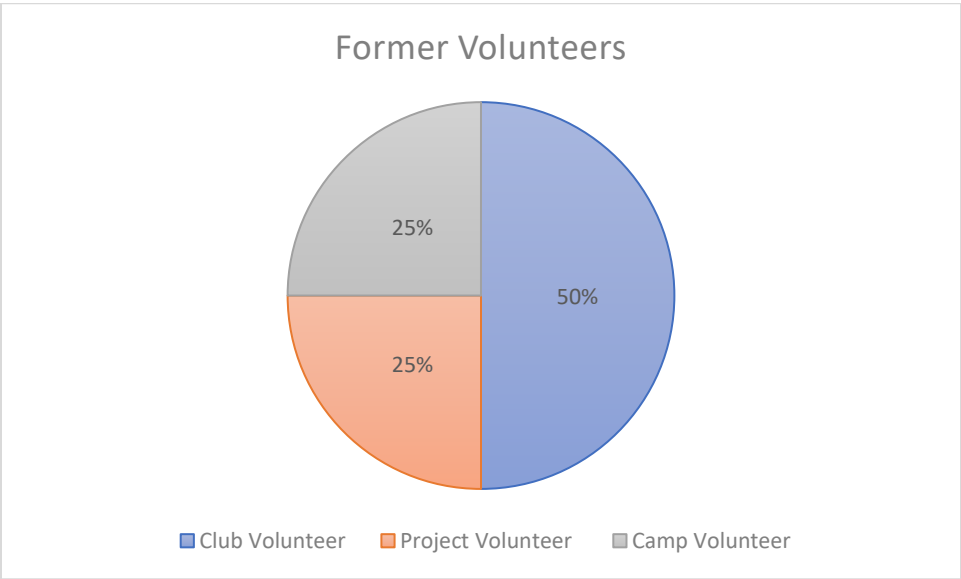


Table 14: Former (no longer a volunteer) volunteer role distribution

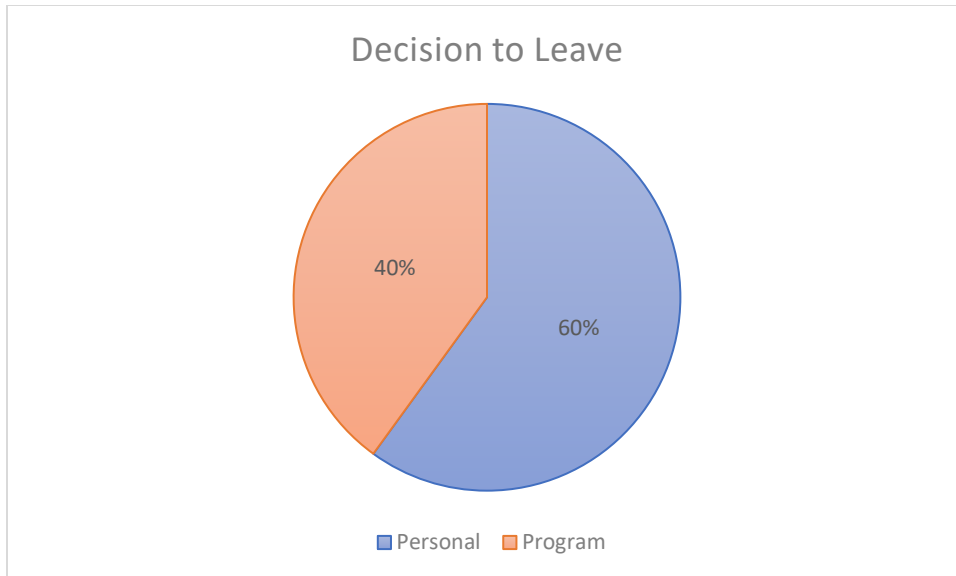


Table 15: Former (no longer a volunteer) volunteer identified factors that influenced their decision to leave the 4-H program

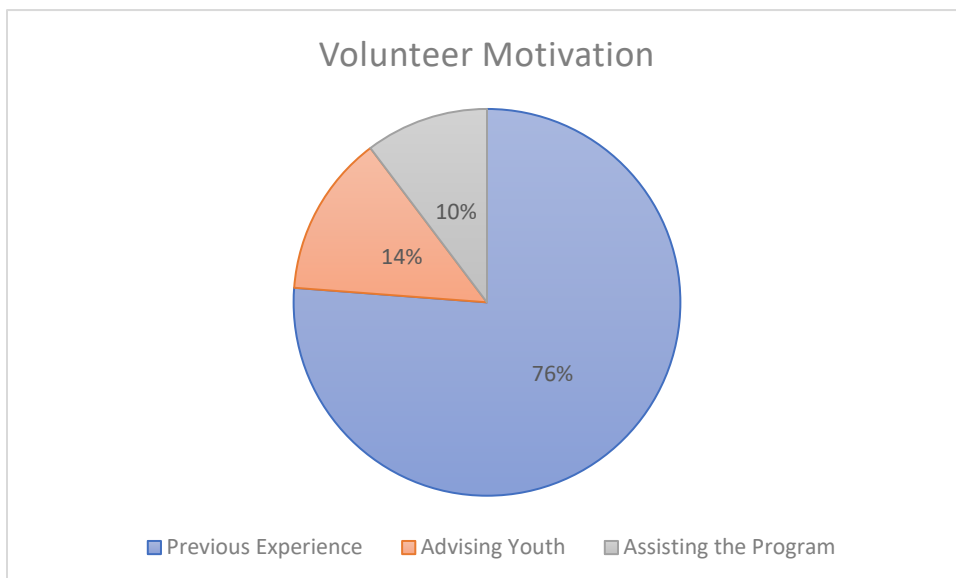


Table 16: All volunteers (new, current, and former) motivational factors that influenced them to become a 4-H volunteer

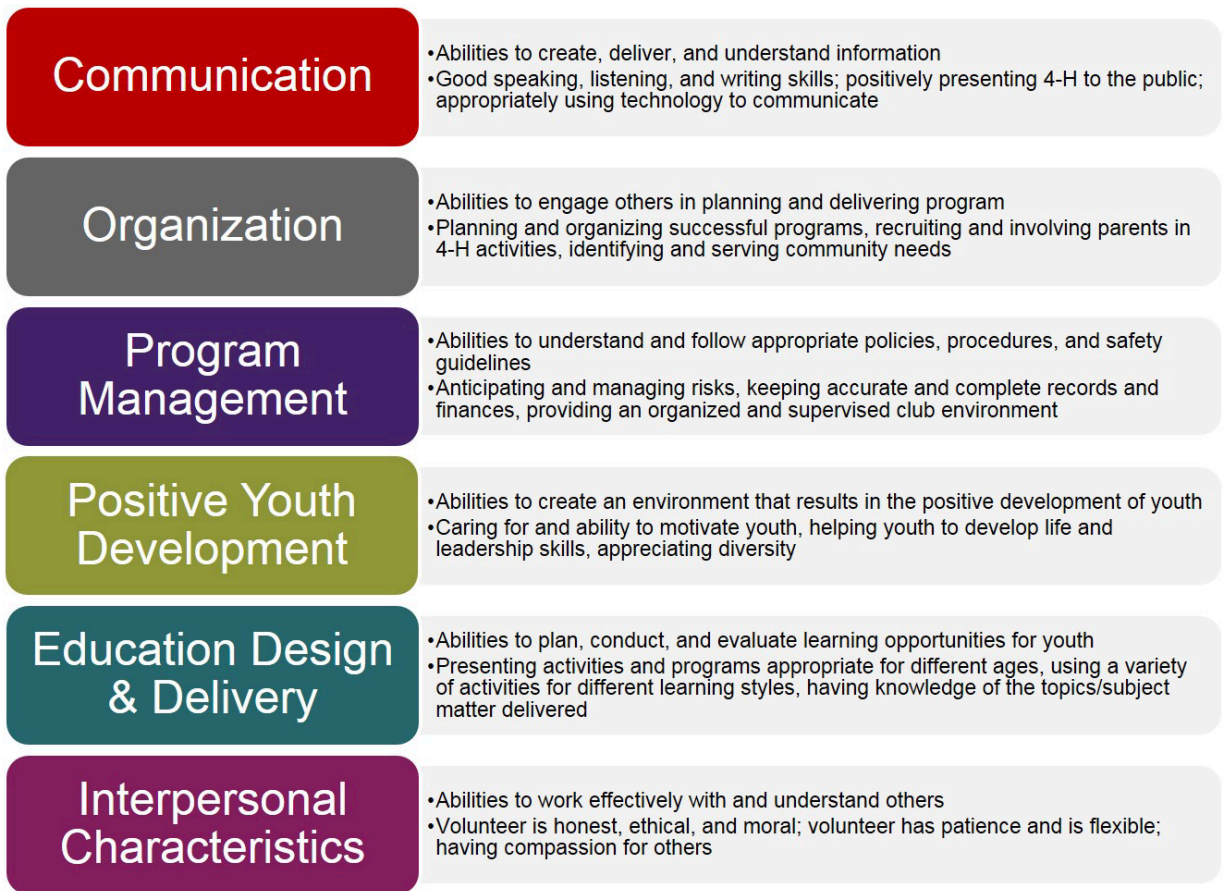


Figure 1: National 4-H Council NRKC Model (Ohio 4-H Volunteerism and Community Club Design Team, 2020)

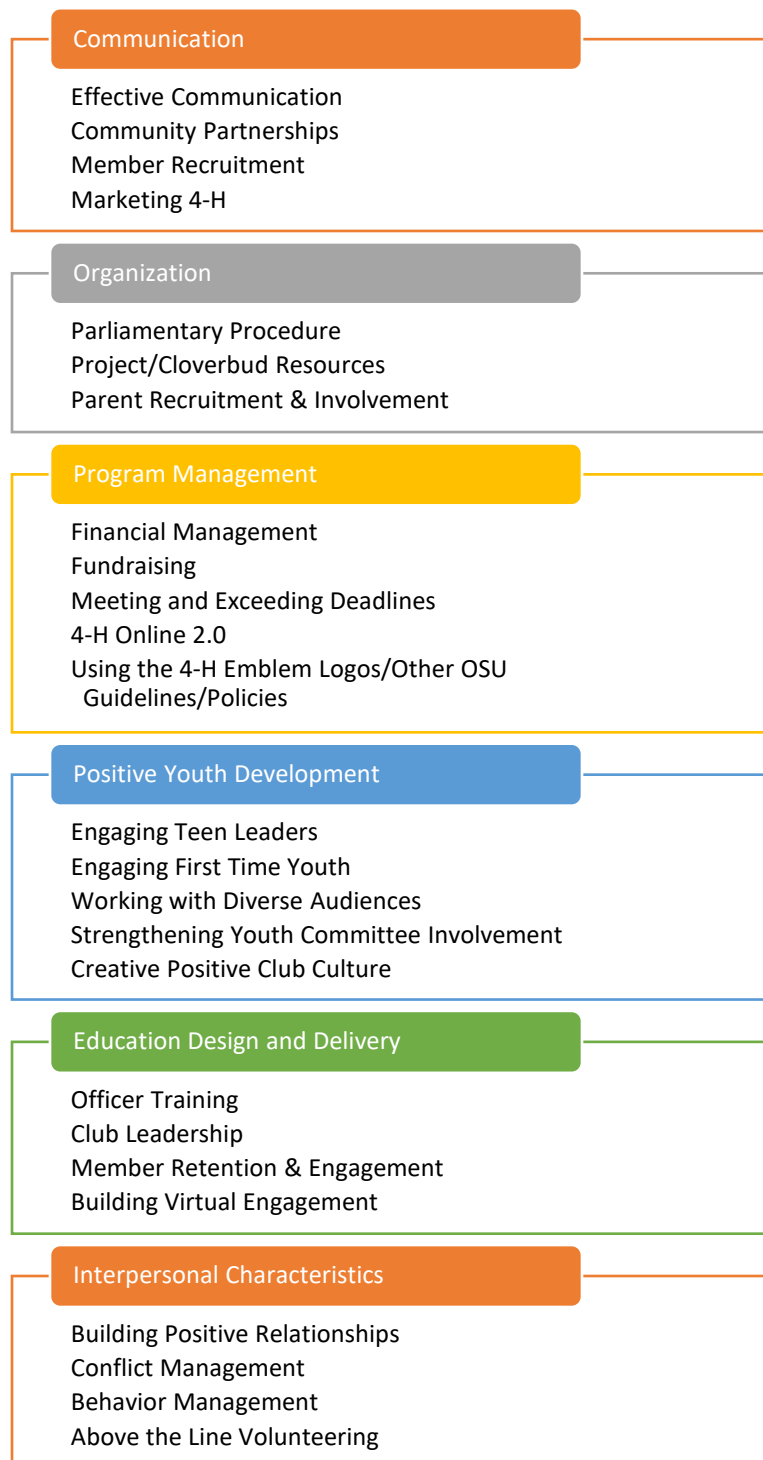


Figure 2: Ohio 4-H volunteer competencies (Ohio 4-H Volunteerism and Community Club Design Team, 2020)

## Ohio 4-H Volunteer Recruitment and Retention in Area 19



A **motivational factor** for 76.2% of volunteers is their previous experience with Ohio 4-H.



61.5% of new volunteers (1-2 years of service) have had a **positive experience**.



**Relationship development** is a motivational factor for 70% of current volunteers (3+ years and active) to continue in their role.



55.4% of current volunteers identified **personal factors** such as time commitments, age, and child involvement influence their decision to leave the Ohio 4-H program.



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## Survey Results

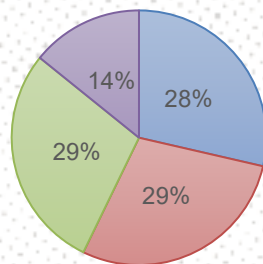
*25.4% response rate*

**10** new volunteers between 31-45 years old

**106** current volunteers from 18 to 81 and over

**4** former volunteers between 18-80 years old

What influences new volunteers to continue in their role?



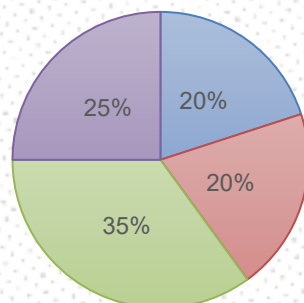
■ Working with youth  
■ Benefit the community

■ Advocate for agriculture/livestock  
■ As long as child(ren) involved

### They continue to volunteer because...

- Value youth development
- Advocate for agriculture
- Give back to the community

Organizational Issues - Current Volunteers



■ None ■ Personal Life ■ Relationships ■ Program Management

### Program Management

- Paperwork and lack of space/time

### Personal Life

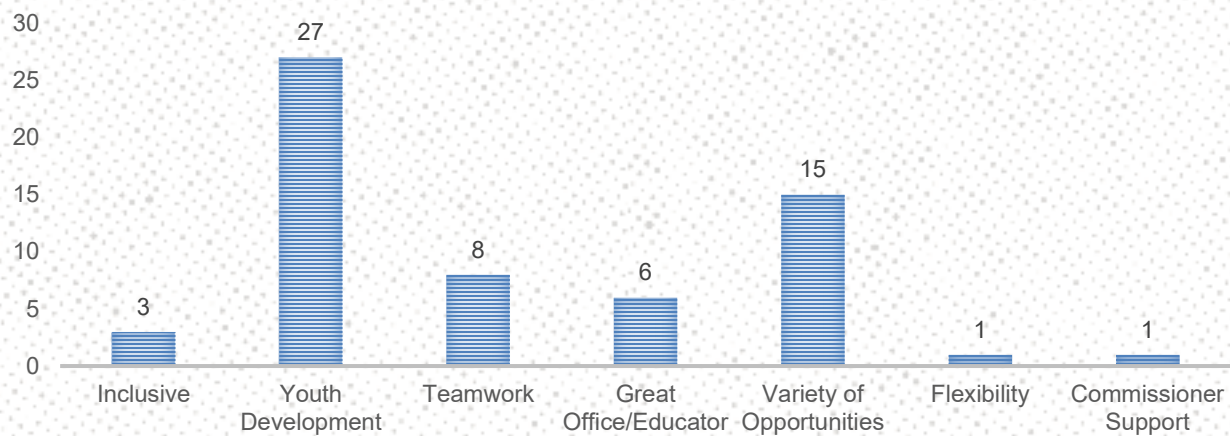
- Too many other commitments

### Relationships

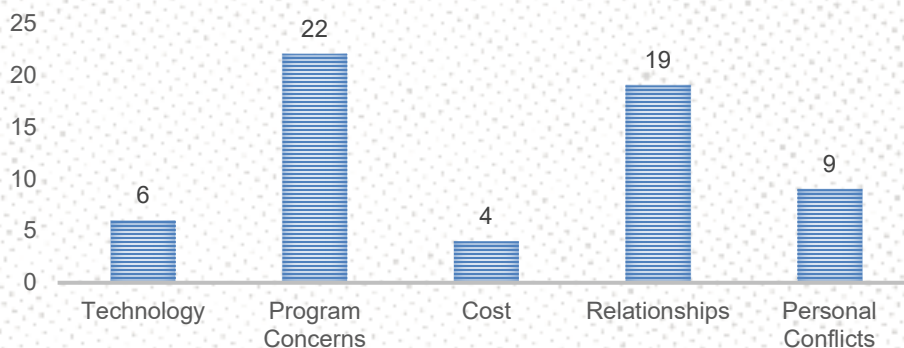
- Responsibility, lack of help, unfair treatment, lack of energy

## Survey Results Continued

### PROGRAM STRENGTHS



### PROGRAM WEAKNESSES



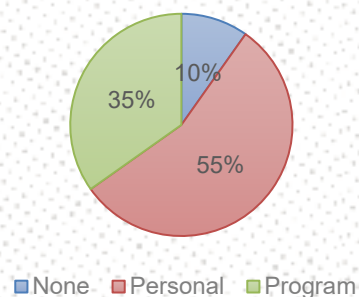
#### Program Concerns

- Rules and requirements
- Pandemic challenges

#### Relationships

- Volunteer burnout
- Increased responsibility

What influences current volunteers to leave the program?



#### Personal Factors

- Child(ren) age out
- Job responsibilities
- Physical health and age

#### Program Factors

- Increased volunteer responsibility
- Lack of communication
- Program restrictions



## Conclusion and Application



Volunteers identified factors that made them feel **unsupported** and **disconnected**.



A variety of **communication** methods are preferred by volunteers, and volunteers value **relationship development** opportunities.



Volunteers identified the importance of **skill building** for youth as well as themselves.



**Program evaluations** for volunteer training to continuously explore and improve ways to support volunteers.

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# Recommendations for Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

## SUPPORT

*Seek to **U**nderstand, **P**rioritize, and **P**ersonalize Opportunities to impact **R**esults long-**T**erm.*

### Recruitment

- Understand the club or program needs
- Determine the appropriate timing in county
  - Target community events
- Personalized invitations
  - From volunteers and Educator
  - Expertise for program or project
- Checklist for new volunteers

### Retention

- Leadership development activities related to club or program management
- Time management evaluations for club or program needs
- Relationship development including conflict management and emotional intelligence activities
- Personalized mental check-in
  - Card, call, or lunch/coffee chat