Recognizing Youth and Showcasing Programmatic Efforts

Introduction

Youth recognition and program showcases are vital parts of any programming cycle. Recognition is a basic youth need, and provides them with motivation to not only complete projects, but to complete them in an exemplary manner. It is important for adults who work with 4-H members to provide appropriate recognition to all participants. The *National 4-H Recognition Model* includes five types of recognition (see *Resources* below).

- Recognition of 4-H members for participation in educational experiences acknowledges involvement as a first step in building a positive self concept.

- Recognition of progress toward personal goals enables youth to gain experience in goal-setting and realistic self-assessment.

- Recognition of the achievement of generally recognized standards of excellence gives youth an external, pre-determined target for their learning experiences.

- Recognition through peer competition is a strong motivation for some but not all young people. It is not appropriate for youth under age eight.

- Recognition for cooperation helps youth learn and work cooperatively, preparing them for living in today's inter-dependent, global society.

Program showcases provide youth a wonderful venue to share what they have learned with others, another form of recognition, and a great incentive to do good work. Showcasing programmatic efforts is also an unparalleled opportunity to promote and market your 4-H Science programs to key stakeholders; program funders and sponsors; local, county and state officials; parents; and the community at large.

The purpose of this chapter is to help program planners understand the importance of providing youth appropriate, meaningful recognition (beyond the obligatory certificate), as well as the value of showcasing programmatic efforts. The following promising practices also contain practical information and ideas for providing youth incentives and recognition and hosting a program showcase.

Promising Practices

The promising practices for *Recognizing Youth* and *Showcasing Programmatic Efforts* are subdivided into two categories: (a) Recognition, and (b) Program Showcases.

Build recognition and program showcase opportunities into initial program design. Instead of viewing a recognition activity as an individual project, it is imperative to include it in program planning and implementation.

Recognition

1. *Recognize successes within a reasonable timeframe.* For maximum effect, do not delay incentives and recognition any longer than necessary.

   • Special events or activities may be included as part of an ongoing program (before the program ends), and may also be used as opportunities for additional enrichment. For example, ropes courses and rock climbing can function as incentives *and* offer teambuilding opportunities.

   • Assess the impact of a program shortly after the program ends to show those involved the effects of their contribution(s).

   • For youth volunteers, recognition should not be just an end-of-program activity or program showcase. A small recognition should be immediate and informal to provide some needed feedback to youth volunteers on their performance. Many programs have annual or bi-annual volunteer awards ceremonies, which make for a nicer event, but this may delay recognition.

2. *Offer meaningful opportunities to recognize youth for their accomplishments.* Sometimes we get "certificate happy" and rely too much on them to provide kudos. Certificates are not always fitting as an expression of gratitude for a teen's commitment to a project. If in doubt, ask youth for ideas. Consider trying the following:

   • Scholarships/sponsorships (for conferences, state and national events or activities);

   • Stipends or other monetary awards;

   • Giving recognition in front of their peers (see *Nolen* in *Case Studies* below);

   • Meals (pizza parties), awards breakfasts, or other food-related treats (ice cream socials);

   • Hand-written thank-you notes;

   • Newspaper, newsletter, website acknowledgments of their successes and contributions;

   • Opportunities to present at conferences, or to be model presenters for training workshops;

   • Showcasing youth in marketing materials and PSAs; and

   • Retreats, annual recognition events and/or trips (e.g., science centers, museums, businesses, etc. – especially if include an overnight stay) can be used as capstone events tied to the educational objectives of the program (see *Ripberger* in *Case Studies* below).

3. *Recognize the value of contests, skillathons, design challenges, etc. as incentives to motivate youth.* Include opportunities for age-appropriate friendly competition in the program design. Youth are naturally competitive, and these kinds of activities will motive youth to complete projects, stimulate learning, and provide an opportunity to recognize them for their accomplishments (see *Nolen* in *Case Studies* below).

4. *Provide authentic leadership opportunities.* Recognizing a young person can be as simple as asking them to show others what they have learned from their past experience with 4-H Science projects. Offer junior leader appointments to youth who completed the program in the prior year. They can oversee resources,

demonstrate experiments, and share what they did last year in the program. Seek their input in the program planning stage.

5. *Create lasting mementos of the experience.* Youth enjoy tangible remembrances, especially photographs.

   - Plan programs to include items that can be sent home at the end of the program (projects, journals, certificates, project books, etc.).

   - Take and share lots of photos and video (e.g., websites, newspapers, newsletters, etc.). Provide youth with copies on DVD or other format at program closing.

6. *Include individual learning portfolios in program planning.* Learning portfolios include a compilation of works created by the youth, such as videos, stories, projects, web-based materials, and so forth. Portfolios can be showcased at county and state fairs or other local community events.

Program Showcase

1. *Create opportunities for youth to showcase program efforts.* Rather than trying to force a fit with other 4-H events, the closing showcases are tied to the program and its timing, location, and community members (see *Ripberger* in *Case Studies* below).

   - Connect to larger community events such as resource fairs, community days, and so forth.

   - Ask to be included in appropriate partner organization events.

   - Arrange for youth to make presentations at stakeholder, school board, and even city/municipals meetings.

2. *Combine recognition events with the program showcase to celebrate youth achievement <u>and</u> promote the program.* Go the extra step to make sure youth are recognized for their commitment and to showcase program efforts.

   - Since a program showcase generally has a larger, more diverse audience than a recognition event alone, youth will feel an even greater sense of pride in the recognition they receive.

   - Combining recognition with a program showcase provides a better picture of youth and program accomplishments for key stakeholders. Consider asking stakeholders to hand out recognition items.

3. *Remember that a program showcase is an important part of the 4-H Science marketing plan.* While this event is an important way to provide recognition to youth, it is invaluable for promoting the program itself (and 4-H Science in general) to the community, including current and potential funders, partners, and so forth.

   - Include refreshments, generally at the beginning of the event.

   - Send invitations via email, regular mail, and with youth.

   - Coordinate with program partners to plan and implement the event.

   - Partner with community venues to host the event, instead of hosting it in primarily 4-H facilities (e.g., school auditoriums, movie theaters, partner organization, etc.).

- Invite parents and other family members. Even if parents cannot attend, they should receive information about the event and the youth should have ribbons, certificates, project books, portfolios, or other kind of end-of-program packet to share with them later. This recognition will give the parent and youth an opportunity to talk about what they did in the program.

4. *Include program partners and key stakeholders.* Show key players what youth are contributing to or accomplishing in the program.

- Local funders are happy to attend culminating events. They feel good about their impact on the youth, and it sets the stage for future funding. Attendance at an event is much more memorable than reading a final report!

- Municipal and county (even state) officials also welcome the opportunity, and often bring media coverage with them. Invite them to speak at the event if possible.

Case Studies

Nolen – Multiple Methods to Motivate and Recognize Youth. A chance to be recognized is a huge motivator, especially when opportunities to win are fun and challenging. A chance to participate with peers on a team promotes cooperation and teambuilding, as well as a sense of achievement. The way opportunities are structured for youth to excel and be recognized has important implications for positive youth development. Evaluations and soliciting feedback from site partners and youth participants help increase understanding about what works and how program design can be improved. The 4-H Science Afterschool Program in Houston uses multiple methods to motivate and recognize youth.

Contests and Skillathons. The 4-H Aerospace program utilizes skillathons to recognize youth. Staff serve as judges using checklists to evaluate each team based on a set criteria for teamwork, problem solving, and conducting successful flight tests. Teams are ranked one to five, with ribbons, certificates, and prizes awarded related to the theme of the contest. Youth also receive a resource book with the activities completed and new activities to try at home. The resource book sent home with youth with a "big" 4-H Emblem on the cover promotes 4-H and boosts enrollment.

Program staff and youth agree that a little competition with prizes, ribbons, and certificates awarded motivates youth and helps them feel a great sense of accomplishment. This is particularly true when working with youth who struggle with English as a second language or have difficulty achieving in the classroom, but gain confidence when they get a chance to prove what they can do. A 5th grade boy who had participated in the 4-H Aerospace Skillathon the year before, reminded program staff how important incentives are when he said out of the blue, "I won fifth place last year flying the airplanes." Later that year, this same boy explained that he could not lead the 4-H Motto and Pledge, because he could not read. The importance of that 5th place ribbon was suddenly magnified.

Recognition can jump-start conversations at home with parents about what they did in 4-H Afterschool that day. Youth recognition incentives are also a great way to promote the program. Incentives that double as educational resources can be a source of pride to the youth, expand learning, and become a family resource the youth can share with parents and siblings.

Engineering Design Challenges. Challenges are easy to organize and can be used to build teamwork (e.g., designing paper bridges, straw structures, ball and track jumps, etc.). Any teambuilding activity that involves constructing something, creative thinking, and problem solving will work. For challenges youth are awarded bonus points for first and second place, or special privileges.

Program Showcases. The 4-H Science Film contest showcases the film projects to peers, parents, and staff. Judges rank the films and award ribbons and certificates. A reception is held to celebrate youth achievements, complete with fruit parfaits.

Peer Recognition. Recognizing youth among peers during the afterschool program or an assembly with key stakeholders, school administrators, and parents promotes a sense of pride for participants and showcases the 4-H Science program. Youth will remember the recognition experience. The awards process (hearing their name called, coming forward to shake hands with the presenter, hearing the applause, and taking their place with their peers) adds meaning to the learning experience. This is how youth get the courage to believe and value intrinsic rewards. They learn that a sense of pride in the accomplishment is more valuable than any extrinsic material rewards. **–Sheryl Nolen, Texas A&M University**

Ripberger - Recognition Motivates Youth and Furthers Educational Goals. 4-H Afterschool in Trenton, New Jersey includes several 4-H Science programs – Design It! and Explore It! (NPASS2 – Center for Science Education at EDC), the Junior Master Gardener® program, and 4-H 4-REEL (a digital filmmaking program). These 12-week programs are delivered by 4-H staff in collaboration with afterschool providers. In each 12-week afterschool program, youth work in teams on multiple projects or toward a culminating project. Incentives, program showcases, and recognition trips are built into each of the 4-H Science programs and are recognized as critical components of program design.

For example, in 4-H 4-REEL, during recruitment of youth and as part of the initial program session, staff outline program incentives and recognition opportunities. This includes a recognition trip to New York City (NYC) for the highest scoring team from each site and cameras for each member of the highest scoring team overall (four sites are involved each year). Participants know their efforts are leading to a final video that will be screened at a closing reception and program showcase with afterschool youth, family, and key stakeholders from each of the four sites. Each team is recognized when their project is screened, and all participants receive certificates and a DVD containing the video projects. Guest judges (a mix of youth development and content-rich professionals) provide feedback to individual teams and select the highest scoring teams from each site. Rather than trying to force a fit with other 4-H events, the closing showcases are tied to the afterschool program and its timing, location, and community members. The recognition trip to NYC includes educational visits to the Sony Wonder Technology Lab, Museum of the Moving Image, and NBC Studios. The key is that recognition is built into the design of the program, occurs throughout the program in multiple ways, serves as a source of motivation, and further enriches the learning. **–Chad Ripberger, Rutgers University**

Resources

National 4-H Recognition Model – the model, including five types of recognition and suggestions for applying the model, is available at *http://www.national4-Hheadquarters.gov/library/4h_recmo.pdf*.