

Staffing with Teenagers and Teens as Cross-Age Teachers

Introduction

Teenage volunteers are often underutilized in youth development programs. Successful 4-H Science programs will include youth partners in all stages of program development, implementation and evaluation using the *Youth as Partners* model (see *Resources* below).

Organizations with limited staff or adult volunteers can expand their outreach to youth in afterschool, summer, and other programs by recruiting, training, and supporting teenage volunteers as cross-age teachers in these settings. There are many other benefits to including teens in program development and delivery, including:

- Teens connect better with younger youth.
- Teens bring fresh ideas to the program.
- Teens provide honest feedback (often better than adult staff).
- As role models, teens provide younger youth something to aspire to, and help maintain their involvement.
- Teens are often proficient in technology skills.
- Teens are often current with trends.
- Teens are often able to recruit additional teens.

The teens as volunteer teachers model of program delivery can provide a powerful service-oriented, community-based learning experience for teenagers, while benefitting those they teach. In addition, this experience may serve as an entry point for older youth to find and connect with 4-H. If the teens are new to 4-H, it is important to involve them in other 4-H activities and events while maintaining involvement through their current teaching role. Teens also benefit by learning important skills and abilities that will prepare them for the future.

It is important to remember that utilizing teens as staff or facilitators requires a substantial commitment to the teens, similar to that required to bring in new adult staff members or volunteers. Program leaders or mentors, however must be ready and willing to respond to the unique needs of the teens in a caring and supportive manner. The purpose of this chapter is to help those engaged in delivering youth science programs locate, recruit, and sustain teens interested in working with 4-H Science programs.





Promising Practices

The promising practices for *Staffing with Teenagers and Teens as Cross-Age Teachers* are subdivided into four categories: (a) Program Planning and Evaluation; (b) Recruitment, (c) Training, and (d) Resources and Support.

Program Planning and Evaluation

1. *Read the chapter 4-H Science Program Design – 4-H Science Checklist.* This chapter provides fundamental program planning and evaluation information required for successful 4-H Science programs. The information contained here is specific to planning programs that utilize teens as staff or volunteers.
2. *Offer authentic, meaningful teaching and/or leadership roles.* Look for ways to include teens in either formal or informal roles. Providing leadership roles to teens can encourage continued 4-H involvement. Remember to offer them a variety of roles; not all teens will want to teach.
3. *Make their role special.* Teens want to stand out, so give them special roles, titles, and positions. Examples include:
 - Unique name badges, lanyards, “uniforms” (perhaps a t-shirt with “STAFF” printed on the back, or in a different color from program participants); and
 - Positions that include graduated levels of responsibility (e.g., Counselor in Training/Counselor; Junior Staff/Senior Staff, etc.) or special titles such as 4-H Science Ambassador.
4. *Provide meaningful recognition.* Recognition is important to sustaining teen involvement. Think beyond big celebration events by looking for ways to provide recognition that is meaningful to the teens. If in doubt, ask program teens how they want to be recognized. Examples include:
 - Ask teens to model exemplary teaching at trainings.
 - Provide teens with opportunities to co-present at a conference (some conferences encourage teen involvement).
 - Send a press release recognizing teen efforts and accomplishments to local media outlets.
 - See also *Recognizing Youth and Showcasing Programmatic Efforts*.
5. *Provide incentives to teens for their time and dedication.* Teens are busy and have lots of demands on their time, including other job opportunities. Make it worthwhile for them to serve as staff or teachers by providing incentives. While an hourly wage is certainly a good incentive, there are other incentives that may appeal to teens. The following examples may be tied to fulfilling some specified commitment, such as number of engagement hours, program completion, and so forth:
 - Educational stipends,
 - Life Skill Incentives (horseback riding lessons, digital camera, photography course),
 - Overnight retreats,

- Registration fees to a teen leadership conference (if they serve on the planning committee or co-present).
6. *Partner with other agencies or organizations that provide youth incentives.* Examples include:
 - AmeriCorps if age 17 or older (see also [Staffing with AmeriCorps Members](#)),
 - Youth jobs programs that provide wages to program participants (check local Workforce Investment Boards – WIBs), or
 - Schools or other organizations that require youth to contribute volunteer service hours.
 7. *Use flexible scheduling practices.* Teens are often engaged in multiple projects or activities. Allow flexibility in their schedules. The use of alternates to fill in staffing gaps may be helpful. Alternates are teens trained to teach a program who may not be available for regular participation, but can fill in as needed.
 8. *Extend service-learning beyond one program.* With a little encouragement, teens will want to continue their efforts.
 9. *Evaluate teen program performance.* Teens need structure and clear expectations. Evaluations provide both and give the teens much needed feedback. Performance evaluations also frame the experience like a job, creating motivation to meet the challenge. Develop rubrics for teaching and standards of teen involvement, and ensure the teens understand them and the performance evaluation process. Consider including self-reflection and peer to peer evaluations as well.

Recruitment

1. *Recruit teens from a variety of sources.* Consider the following:
 - Market needs to schools and teen programs with volunteer or service-learning requirements.
 - Tap into vocational or career track programs to provide field placements for those teens.
 - Contact high school science, media, and ecology clubs. Partner with the lead teacher/advisor in these programs to facilitate recruitment efforts.
 - Recruit from collaborating afterschool/summer program providers and their teen advisors.
 - Look for teens with an interest in facilitating program delivery to their feeder elementary or junior high/middle schools (if nearby). Teens take pride in going back to their former schools in non-student roles, and working with feeder schools may reduce transportation and other logistical difficulties.
 - Perhaps the easiest (and most overlooked) source for recruiting teen partners is to simply ask current teen staffers and volunteers!
2. *Assess teens interested in becoming program partners.* Ensure a good fit *before* engaging the teens. For example, estimate the time demands of the position, and compare that to how much time the teen can realistically commit. Also ascertain their degree of subject matter interest as well as teaching readiness. Extensive content knowledge need not be a prerequisite.
3. *Emphasize the employment process.* Treat potential teen partners as job seekers for a paid position, regard-





less of whether financial incentives are involved. This serves to increase the pool of viable applicants, and navigating the process provides much-needed life skills training to youth.

- *Develop a detailed position description.* Include the time commitment required as well as specific task details. Also be sure to include (and discuss) the benefits of participating. Teens should know what to expect for the time they are devoting. Inform them of tangible (e.g., money, prizes, etc.) and intangible awards (e.g., skills and abilities, future life success).
- *Require completion of a written “job application” and a personal interview.* This is a good pre-screening tool (teens who are not really interested will opt out), and helps the teens practice job application and interviewing skills. Consider hosting a pre-application workshop to help teens feel comfortable with the process.
- *Implement a teen “employment” contract.* Ask teens (and adult partners) involved in the program to complete a contract stating that after successfully completing the training, they will teach XY number of youth with XY number of hours of content. It should include any incentives the teen will receive. This may be a good time to discuss with teens any personal goals they hope to reach, and what kind of support they require.

Training

1. *Read the chapter Training Others to Deliver High Quality Science Programming.* This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of promising practices for training staff and volunteers. The promising practices contained here are geared specifically to training teen staff or volunteers to deliver 4-H Science programs.
2. *Provide quality training for teens and their adult partners.* Ensure that enough time is planned for training teens *and* the adults who will be supporting them. Provide enough training to ensure the product or outcome desired, but not so much that it overwhelms the teens. Plan trainings according to the developmental state of the teens. Remember that teens will respond better when they are part of developing the plan and implementing the solution.
 - Require adult partners to attend the trainings. No matter how knowledgeable adults are in the subject matter, they must understand how to implement the specific program, as well as how to work with teen partners.
 - Allow time for teens to plan program delivery. Teach not only the content piece but also the “how” to find groups to teach.
 - Include teambuilding initiatives for teens *and* their adult partners.
 - Model the skills and behaviors you want participants to emulate. Always keep in mind that people model what they see; teens are certainly no exception.
 - Use experienced teens as co-trainers. This is a form of recognition, and helps “keep it real” for the trainees. Have a model facilitator session using the experienced teens.
3. *Create opportunities to practice!* Practice takes extra time but is a vital component of a successful teen teaching experience. Make suggestions and offer resources that strengthen what and how they are teaching. If there are multiple teens teaching multiple workshops, have them present their lessons to each other, and guide a constructive discussion after each presentation. This creates a learning community as well as a teach-

ing support system for them to access before, during, and after their teaching experience.

4. *Group youth into teaching teams.* Assigning teens into teaching teams creates greater comfort for them as they are planning and implementing the lessons. It also builds a sense of accountability – to each other. Allow teens to work with whomever they choose.
 - Create teams with 2-4 teens and 1 adult coach/partner.
 - Pair a more experienced teen teacher with an inexperienced teen. The experienced teen can mentor the new teen. It is the experienced teen’s responsibility to move the new teen through the process (counselor-in-training concept).
5. *Ask youth to visualize the teaching process.* Help them think through the lesson, including what they might need and how they will present the activity. Ask teens to brainstorm about the kinds of unexpected occurrences they might encounter and how they would handle them. Problem-solving ahead of time increases the teens’ ability to deal with problems when they occur, but try to avoid simply presenting them with solutions.

Resources and Support

1. *Provide research-based curricula and materials.* Materials should be teen-friendly, easy to follow, and structured in a way that is suitable to teens working in pairs or teams to present in a variety of settings (for more about appropriate curricula see also *Inquiry Based Learning Approaches*).
2. *Supportive adult partners are a critical factor in great teen teaching.* They should understand the goals and philosophy of the program. A supportive adult should be present when a teen is teaching, to provide moral support and to assist should something unexpected happen. Look for adults who:
 - Have a strong rapport with teens,
 - Can gently pose ideas to consider,
 - Are good listeners, and
 - Enjoy teenagers.
3. *Ensure that adults working with teens are trained and prepared.* Determine readiness of adults for this role. Adult partners must be willing to:
 - Commit fully to understanding and practicing the Youth as Partners model.
 - Understand expectations.
 - Know the curriculum.
 - Attend and participate in trainings (do not let them off the hook!).
 - Assist with obtaining supplies and materials, room preparation, and other logistics.
 - Mentor/coach teens.





- Assist with maintaining the learning environment (e.g., unruly youth, logistical difficulties, etc.).
- Help facilitate continuous development of the teens' skills.

4. *Assist teens in reflecting on their teaching experience.* When teens reflect on their teaching responsibility, they identify their strengths as teachers and areas upon which they need to improve. This is an important step, so explore methods to encourage the process, such as face-to-face meetings, phone conversations, journaling (be sure to include a method to provide feedback), and so forth.


Case Studies

Arnett – Science-Based Teen Employment Program Facilitates Life Skill Development. The Adventure Central summer Job Experience and Training (JET) work-based learning program engages teens in parks-related careers to increase skills and deliver a service to the public. Each summer 20-25 teens are placed in a variety of roles (e.g., park maintenance, day camp counselor, information technology, nutrition/food service, administrative, public education, recreation education, etc.) and mentored by an adult supervisor over the eight-week program. Teen day camp counselors serve as program facilitators for younger youth and deliver a science and nature curriculum. A variation of the program has been offered during the school year targeted at early teens to place them in a position of responsibility, typically assisting with one of the younger groups. Teen counselors are also utilized for the Adventure Central overnight camp experience. Teens participate in three to four planning and training sessions throughout the year and then implement the three-day, two-night camp with staff support. One or two teens serve as the camp director and facilitate the camp experience while supporting their peers and holding them accountable for program performance. As part of the science fair, older youth help to critique and support younger youth as they work on their oral presentations. These older youth have the benefit of previous coaching through the program and are excited to share their knowledge. Younger youth appreciate the older teens' interest and feedback. Older youth also assist with judging for the science fair. **–Nate Arnett, The Ohio State University**

Bird – Teens in Authentic Leadership Roles Expand Reach of 4-H Science. Engaging teens in the delivery of 4-H Science programs is an excellent way to enhance the learning experience for younger youth, develop teens' budding skills, and bring new, older youth to the 4-H experience. In Sacramento, teens teach weekly 4-H Youth Experience in Science (YES) Program lessons to children in grades K-3 in afterschool programs. Teens also serve as both program planners and as staff for the 4-H On the Wild Side environmental education camp that takes place two weekends in late May/early June for 4th-6th grade youth. In both instances, teens work in teams to plan and deliver science lessons from pre-determined curricula. Teens are recruited through local high schools, service clubs, and from afterschool programs with the YES Program. Often teens who volunteer for the programs have service requirements they need to complete for school, and they find 4-H programs via the web or through word of mouth.

Teens are treated as valuable resources, know what is expected, and are given the tools and resources (including adult coaching) to do their jobs. Each program has an application process and training: YES requires 10 hours of training (a Friday evening and most of the day on a Saturday); On the Wild Side requires four evening meetings, a six-hour training, and a weekend retreat. In both programs, teenagers engage in authentic leadership and teaching roles. They are completely responsible for planning, organizing, and delivering the program. **–Marianne Bird, University of California**





Francis – Teen Teams and Adult Coaches Deliver Community STEM Experiences. The TRY STEM: Teens Reaching Youth in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math program is designed to provide teens in grades 8-12 with formal leadership and teaching opportunities. 4-H teens deliver STEM experiences during out-of-school time to younger audiences and the community at large. A 4-H TRY team consists of two to four teens, working in partnership with an adult coach. TRY teams, both members and coaches, complete a variety of local, regional, and statewide trainings to prepare them to successfully facilitate the project for younger youth. A TRY training is divided into two parts: (a) TRY Core Training – participants learn how to work with and teach younger youth, while working as a team with fellow members, and (b) Curriculum Training – participants complete in-depth training in a specific curriculum or project area. Kits to support the curriculum are available for check-out.

As part of receiving the STEM training, teens complete a contract stating that they will teach at least 15 youth for a minimum of six hours of STEM content (to the same group of youth). Teams are challenged to earn a bronze, silver, or gold level, with corresponding awards based upon the number of youth taught. Teens have provided STEM experiences during afterschool programs, 4-H Achievement Nights, Family Science Nights, and special events (e.g., Science Day, Saturday Robotics, etc.). One county documented their STEM efforts in a film produced by the teens. The film was awarded 1st Place 4-H Science Film at the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents Conference. –**Dave Francis, Utah State University**

Resources

Creating Youth-Adult Partnerships: Training Curricula for Youth, Adults and Youth-Adult Teams – leads youth and adults new to group facilitation and to youth-adult partnerships through a 6-8 hour training that builds their capacity to work together in true collaboration. The 156-page step-by-step curriculum includes detailed scripts, activities, and evaluation materials. Available at <http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/store/87>.

Engaging Older Youth: Program and City-Level Strategies to Support Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time – includes information on keeping youth engaged over time, developmental differences between middle school and high school programs, city-level supports to promote and sustain participation, and key findings and implications. Available at <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/Out-Of-SchoolLearning/Pages/engaging-older-youth-city-level-strategies-support-sustained-participation-out-of-school-time.aspx>.

Teens as Volunteer Leaders: Recruiting and Training Teens to Work with Younger Youth in After-School Programs – includes information on the elements of teens as volunteer leaders, teen recruitment, mentor and after-school program recruitment, project orientation, training, recognizing program participants, and promoting 4-H afterschool. One of several 4-H Afterschool Resource Guides available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/102794559/As-TeenVolunteers-1>.