

State Level Practices to Advance Urban Programming

Introduction

4-H Youth Development programs traditionally are not staffed to serve youth in urban communities. The predominant county model has been one 4-H professional per county (in some counties, both the agriculture and family and consumer science educators deliver relevant 4-H youth development programs). These professionals have provided traditional programming to rural and suburban youth for decades. Position descriptions for 4-H faculty and staff have focused upon the traditional 4-H professional – someone to manage volunteers, organize and run a club program, county fair, and other events. Positions often have been filled by former 4-H members, also from a “traditional” 4-H background.

At some point, county 4-H professionals recognized the long-overlooked need to bring quality youth development programs to urban youth. The challenge, however was how to meet this need when few state or regional offices across the country were prepared to support urban youth programs. Many counties have risen to the challenge, and are striving to develop and implement urban Extension programs on par with traditional Extension programming. *The underlying assumption for this chapter is that most current urban programming is the result of an organic (bottom-up) approach to program development.* What seems to be lacking in many areas, however is a strategic “top down” approach to supporting urban Extension programming.

The 4-H Science professionals who collaborated on this volume are a diverse mix, yet they have two things in common: (a) they are passionate about and committed to providing urban youth with quality 4-H Science programs, and (b) they concur that the degree of programming success for any sustained urban initiative is directly related to the state’s level of commitment, and the practices and policies in place to support urban programming efforts.

Many 4-H youth development professionals engaged in urban programming have reported feeling isolated within their institutions, as well as within traditional state 4-H programs or with their 4-H colleagues. This seems to be particularly true in states that still support relatively large rural/suburban areas. There is, therefore a compelling need for the creation of local, state, and national communities of practice to support urban 4-H agents and educators.

Ultimately, for 4-H Science programs to successfully meet the needs of urban youth there must be administrative (state level) support for the programs *and* the 4-H staff and volunteers who develop and implement them. The purpose of this chapter is to outline key state level practices for advancing urban 4-H Science programming.

Promising Practices

The promising practices for *State Level Practices to Advance Urban Programming* are subdivided into five categories: (a) Philosophy, (b) Institutional Support for Urban Programming, (c) Statewide Partnerships, (d) Program





Planning, and (e) Staffing.

Philosophy

1. *Develop vision and mission statements to support 4-H urban Extension programming.* It is important that the differences (philosophical and operational) between urban and traditional programming are recognized. While they are different, urban programming complements traditional extension programming. A carefully crafted vision and mission statement will create cohesion between traditional and urban extension programs and personnel and can lead to integrating urban programming into the core of the Extension mission.
2. *Define the “urban” issue.* While most extension professionals understand that urban programming is different, it is sometimes hard to clearly articulate what “urban” means. Many of the factors that make an area urban are shared by suburban and rural communities (e.g., socio-economic and cultural isolation, disenfranchised communities, concentrated poverty, etc.). Often people confuse “urban” with “big” – a “big” city is urban, a small city is not. A city with a population of 50,000 may, however face the same challenges as a community within a city of six million.
3. *Recognize that a 4-H “urban” extension office serves the state, not just a particular geographic region.* The purpose of an urban office (center, department, urban specialist, etc.) should be to create models that can be replicated in other areas *with similar issues*, ideally in a way that will help position 4-H as a leader in urban youth development efforts in the state (and across the nation).

Institutional Support for Urban Programming

1. *Develop statewide support for urban programming – “from the top.”* The Extension director’s office and the state 4-H program leader’s office must make serving urban audiences a priority. Support for urban programming must be explicit and sincere, and include resources to back the efforts of those working in these communities. Extension administrators must commit to:
 - Identifying and supporting strong leadership; someone with access to the director’s office – better yet – someone from *within* the director’s office.
 - Providing mini-grants to seed innovation in this area; to help urban programs develop partnerships and become sustainable.
 - Supporting professional development for urban 4-H agents/educators/staff; including involvement in the Urban Extension Conference sponsored by the north central region, or other professional development opportunities related to urban programming.
 - Developing and sustaining urban programs outside of Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) supported projects and sites.
 - Ensuring equal opportunity (scholarships, awards, etc.) for urban youth to participate in state and national youth conferences, trips, camps, and so forth.
2. *Integrate urban programming into existing Extension, 4-H, and Department committee structure(s).* Help those working in urban communities develop a community of practice to share and discuss their work and to plan multicounty and/or statewide urban programs.



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3. *Communicate the value of urban programming efforts – to everyone.* The move to non-traditional, urban programming may meet with some resistance, as people may naturally fear this will translate to a corresponding move *away* from serving traditional audiences.
 - Reassure traditional clientele who may or may not see the importance of these initiatives by emphasizing that urban programming benefits *everyone*.
 - Highlight urban programming efforts at state Extension board meetings, on the state Extension website, in the statewide Extension annual report, and so forth.
 - Partner with Extension and university offices of communication to promote urban initiatives.
 - Involve urban stakeholders on state Extension boards and advisory groups.
 4. *Demonstrate institutional support by recognizing urban programs and professionals.* University officials, Extension administrators, and 4-H department heads and/or program leaders can show support by:
 - Attending youth program showcases.
 - Nominating urban programs and program staff for state and national awards.
 - Creating special “urban” awards for programs and practitioners.
 - Including “urban efforts” in a special section of newsletters, annual reports, websites, and so forth.

Statewide Partnerships (internal and external)

1. *Read the [Section Introduction](#) to Partnerships, Resource Development, Program Growth and Sustainability.* This introduction contains critical “overarching principles” that are vital to developing and sustaining program partners regardless of scope or venue.
2. *Develop partnerships within urban communities.* It is vital to develop and sustain relationships with urban communities and individuals in order to create a solid base of support for developing and carrying out urban programs.
3. *Bring together state level organizations and agencies who may be interested in multicounty, area, or state-wide partnerships.* At the state level, identify statewide organizations with similar missions that are also located in urban areas throughout the state. In partnership with these organizations, develop demonstration sites that may be replicated in other cities.
4. *Facilitate grant proposal development among urban 4-H professionals.* Provide support for urban 4-H professionals to collaborate on large grant proposals and programs for statewide (multicity) efforts.

Program Planning

1. *Engage in strategic planning from the start.* Use the logic model to drive state 4-H Science program development and evaluation. Customize the model to fit each program, with a focus on outcomes.
2. *Focus on program development as opposed to replicating traditional programs.* Bringing 4-H Science programming to urban youth audiences is not simply a matter of duplicating existing programs. If it *were* that

simple, this guide would not be necessary!

- Develop new models for working with the diversity of audiences, situations, and challenges found in urban areas.
- Create multicounty and/or statewide initiatives that target and support urban communities such as NPASS2, 4-H Summer Science, and so forth (see *NPASS2* and *Summer Science in Case Studies below*).
- Focus on building the capacity of community volunteers and paraprofessionals to deliver and support science programs.

Staffing

1. *Implement changes in staffing patterns to reflect population needs.* Plot current staffing patterns on a large state map, and compare to areas that face urban challenges. Most states will need to change the way faculty and staff are located throughout the state (both in density of placements and their physical location) in order to adequately support urban programming.
 - Locate urban professionals in or near the urban communities they serve to facilitate access. County offices often are not situated in the county's population center. Urban partners may be willing to provide office space for Extension partners.
 - Hire additional professionals or program associates to focus solely on the urban communities within a county. This focus is necessary in order to develop and sustain urban partnerships, resources, staffing, and programming.
2. *Recruit a diverse workforce.* Urban 4-H professionals and paraprofessionals should be as representative of the urban communities served as possible. Commit to providing any training necessary to help community members develop skills needed to fill open positions.
 - Develop strategic position descriptions (e.g., skills needed in an urban program, tasks, responsibilities, etc.) that are unique for urban positions.
 - Advertise urban positions broadly to a variety of communities, and think beyond the typical avenues.
3. *Evaluate urban professionals based on the uniqueness of their position descriptions and programs.* Many standards/benchmarks for evaluating county 4-H programs are based on traditional, volunteer-driven, community-based club programs. Criteria for evaluations should be outlined at the same time position descriptions are developed.

Case Studies

Russo – Urban 4-H Office Created to Develop Program Models for Underserved Youth. In 2004, the youth development program of the University of Minnesota Extension received funds to start and support a Minnesota Urban 4-H Youth Development Office (Urban 4-H), in order to expand 4-H's capacity to engage Minnesota's underserved youth. Though programs are concentrated in the Twin Cities area, Urban 4-H collaborates with colleagues across the state to find ways of expanding programming to reach youth across diverse geographic areas, languages, cultures, and religions. STEM has offered many opportunities to do this, through collaborative grants and initiatives (e.g., CYFAR and National 4-H Mentoring grants), and interdisciplinary funding for a University 4-H STEM specialist.





The Minnesota Urban 4-H Youth Development Office works with and on behalf of youth living in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the surrounding communities to measurably improve their learning and leadership through educational programs and applied research. The purpose of Urban 4-H is to contribute to the field of youth development by developing, piloting, and sharing successful models of improving the learning and leadership of urban young people, particularly those youth who live in at-risk conditions. The ultimate goal is to support high-quality, engaging programming for urban youth to drive their current and future success by experiencing mastery, building 21st century leadership skills, and developing a sense of global citizenship. The critical issue that drives our work is the need of youth, particularly those from low-income communities (regardless of geographic location), to learn how to overcome economic, educational, and social barriers, including barriers to STEM career paths.

Urban 4-H works with youth, families, volunteers, interns, and community-based organizations to co-create out-of-school time (OST) Urban 4-H clubs focused on youth-led learning experiences in the areas of STEM, citizenship, and healthy living. The program model begins with youth, family, and community partnerships. Urban 4-H operates through a highly integrated leader support system consisting of program and strategic planning support of partners by Urban 4-H staff, an intern and volunteer program that carries out the delivery of youth clubs, and a training and support program designed to give a common foundational base of development for Urban 4-H partners. With this support system in place, Urban 4-H youth master their learning through meaningful reflection along with real opportunities to connect their skills and interests to careers and higher education. **-Jessica Russo, University of Minnesota**

Ripberger - New 4-H Department Committee Brings Focus to Urban Programming. The Rutgers 4-H Youth Development Department established an urban programming committee in 2008. The purpose was to develop a community of practice for the increasing number of urban 4-H professionals in the state, given the recent hires in the densely populated counties between Philadelphia and New York City. Many of the new hires work in cities within counties that already have an agent. Relative to the rest of the state, those located in urban centers are more likely to have significant programming efforts through collaborations with afterschool and summer program providers. This committee, as part of the department's core structure, has not only provided an opportunity for these professionals to learn from one another, but also to work together on multi-county 4-H Science projects targeting youth from urban communities. In 2008, a subgroup of the Urban Programming Committee received a three-year, \$150,000 grant from the Extension Director's office to boost the level of OST STEM programming in Camden, Hackensack, Paterson, and Trenton. This four-county collaboration led to the annual Rutgers 4-H Summer Science Program and NJ 4-H's participation in the National Partnerships for After School Science (NPASS2) program led by the Center for Science Education at EDC. Through NPASS2, 4-H is leading a statewide OST science professional development effort targeting urban afterschool programs. **-Chad Ripberger, Rutgers University**

Resources

Urban Extension Conference - this bi-annual conference, sponsored by the north central region, targets Cooperative Extension staff who work in urban communities. Participants build strategic partnerships, identify strategies to enhance the resource base for urban programming, capture best practices of urban Extension, and explore emerging issues. Available at <http://www.dce.k-state.edu/conf/urban-extension/>.