

4-H Professional Research, Knowledge, and Competency Model

4-H PRKC, 2004

4-H professionals set high standards for their work and take their role as youth development educators seriously. Just as 4-H'ers strive to make the best better; we as 4-H professionals strive to give them our best.

Since 1985, the 4-H youth development profession has relied upon a 4-H professional research and knowledge base to guide our efforts when working with and on behalf of young people. In 2004, the most current and comprehensive research and knowledge representing the field of 4-H youth development was compiled, including the competencies that are essential to conducting 4-H youth development programs. The study resulted in the 4-H Professional Research, Knowledge, and Competencies model (4-H PRKC, 2004) and focuses on what matters most when working with young people.

Six integrated, yet distinct, areas were identified: youth development; youth program development; volunteerism; equity, access, and opportunity; partnerships; and organizational systems.

Youth Development

Understanding how young people learn and grow

Understanding and applying youth development principles is the cornerstone of 4-H. Well-intentioned but uninformed youth workers may develop inappropriate activities because of a lack of knowledge in youth development. Young people, families, and communities all benefit when youth development educators understand and can effectively apply sound youth development principles. The Youth Development area of the 4-H PRKC (2004) highlights the physical, cognitive, and emotional growth of young people, age 5 to 19, and the competencies needed to develop age-appropriate activities and expectations.

This domain also emphasizes youth development theory and topics for actual youth development practice, including the essential elements of building relationships and programming for life skill development. Mastering the competencies in the Youth Development domain, the youth educator can apply youth development principles and manage the day-to-day implementation of programs in which young people learn and grow in a safe environment.

Youth Program Development

Creating quality experiences for young people

4-H professionals know how to work with young people and adults to design creative and effective programs. Program development is the process by which 4-H professionals connect what is known about young people, their needs, and their environment to build sound programs that make a difference. This domain describes the knowledge, skills, and competencies youth development professionals need, beginning with analyzing the situation, assessing needs of young people, setting priorities, and designing programs that meet those needs and issues. Program evaluation topics are also included to highlight the importance of verifying the impact a program has had on young people. Youth program development is intentional and purposeful and involves making decisions about learning experiences that will create the best positive outcomes for young people. When a 4-H youth worker is effective in program development, the credibility of 4-H and the quality of the programs offered increases accordingly.

Volunteerism

Preparing volunteers to make a real difference

Building and maintaining volunteer management systems is an essential role of the 4-H youth worker. Each year, over 500,000 4-H volunteers

show their enduring commitment to young people through in their work with community clubs, after-school programs, special interest activities, and residential and day camps, and on boards and committees. Strong volunteer management systems that attract, retain, and energize youth and adults lead to stronger advocates for 4-H and improved outcomes for youth.

The 4-H PRKC (2004) describes the knowledge, skills, and competencies that successful 4-H volunteer administrators use. They include developing a personal philosophy, recruiting and selecting volunteers, and adult development and learning theory. Topics also emphasize the competencies needed for establishing and sustaining successful volunteer programs.

Equity, Access, and Opportunity

Ensuring that each young person has a chance to succeed

4-H professionals know what 4-H can do in the lives of young people. Now, more than ever before, youth workers must ensure that 4-H serves all communities by interacting effectively and equitably with diverse individuals and communities. The domain entitled Equity, Access, and Opportunity within the 4-H PRKC (2004) describes the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to create an environment in which all youth feel a sense of belonging and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Cultural competence begins with personal sensitivity; awareness of the values, norms, and practices of others; and the role of communication in working with diverse audiences. Topics also include designing and conducting programs that are relevant and examining policies, staffing models, and community outreach efforts to encourage long-term relationships with diverse communities.

Partnerships

Uniting young people and adults for stronger communities

A trademark of 4-H youth development is the notion of building community spirit and connection among individuals. The youth development

professional knows the theory and practice behind building social capital and the benefits that come to young people and adults when they work in caring and supportive relationships. The knowledge, skills, and competencies in the Partnerships domain goes beyond youth and adult partnerships to include youth action, building organizational alliances, and the role of the youth worker in community development.

Organizational Systems

Connecting people and priorities for the greatest impact

Today's youth development work requires a complex set of skills that are necessary for a stable and sustainable 4-H youth development program. The area of Organizational Systems captures those areas that are relevant to the daily work of 4-H and at the same time focus on the mission and vision of youth development for tomorrow. This domain includes appropriate communication strategies, resource development, and risk management systems to maintain quality programs and to enhance the credibility of the 4-H organization. It also highlights management and interpersonal skills, including a balance between work and life outside of the job. Mastering these competencies leads to a sense of professionalism that underscores the value of ethics, improved scholarship in 4-H, and greater impact on young people.

The National 4-H Leadership Trust has adopted the 4-H Professional Research, Knowledge, and Competencies (4-H, PRKC, 2004) for use throughout the 4-H system (June 2004). Thanks are expressed to the National 4-H Professional Development Task Force for conducting the study, and to many others for their input. Thanks are also expressed to the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents for their valuable role in sustaining the 4-H professional research and knowledge base over the years. Modifications to or updates of the 4-H PRKC will be by means of the National 4-H Leadership Trust. The responsibility of updating the 4-H PRKC will be with National 4-H Headquarters, CSREES, USDA. The 4-H PRKC (2004) can be found at: <http://www.4h-usa.org/>

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