



Understanding the 4-H Workforce: Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Prepared by:

Dr. Kirk A. Astroth
Montana State University
4-H Center for Youth Development
210 Taylor Hall, MSU
Bozeman, MT 59717
Ph. 406.994.5691
kastroth@montana.edu

Commissioned by National 4-H Headquarters with funding provided by the National 4-H Council



February 2007





Understanding the 4-H Workforce: Staffing, Structures and Salaries

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

National 4-H Headquarters and Kirk Astroth gratefully acknowledge the expert group who helped with the development of the survey design and questions. Thanks go to Dorothy Freeman, Minnesota; Penny Crinion, Illinois; Martha Welch, Kentucky; Laura Marek, Connecticut; Eddy Mentzger, National 4-H Headquarters; Julie Chapin, Michigan; and Barbara Stone, National 4-H Headquarters. Thanks is also expressed to National 4-H Council for funding this project through funds received in support of 4-H professional development.

Finally, the author would like to thank all those who participated in this survey and provided such detailed information. These results would not have been possible without their cooperation and efforts. Many thanks to the dedicated professionals who have supported this effort and, by their responses, have provided important benchmark data for future studies that will help strengthen the 4-H youth development profession. That said, the views expressed in this report, and any errors, are solely the author's who takes full responsibility for the results reported herein.

Montana 4-H Center for Youth Development



Established by the Montana Board of Regents in 2002, the Montana 4-H Center for Youth Development serves as a leading source of expertise in the theory and practice of positive youth development. The 4-H Center for Youth Development serves as a resource for all youth development workers by helping build the capacity of their organizations through research, training, technical assistance and consultation.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce: Staffing, Structures and Salaries

Abstract

The results from the National 4-H Headquarters' survey of the 4-H workforce provides baseline data about 4-H staffing structures in which 4-H professionals work and salaries ranges as reported by state Extension 4-H directors. All 50 states responded to the survey and results are reported in eight areas--(1) profile of respondents; (2) current 4-H staffing structures; (3) staffing trends and changes since 1990; (4) academic degree requirements; (5) compensation levels; (6) academic and other preparation; (7) ideal staffing models; and (8) current and future challenges. There was broad consensus about the disciplines that provided the best preparation for youth work—education, human development and child development. The survey revealed that academic training of 4-H professionals and compensation for 4-H youth workers was higher compared to their counterparts in youth work elsewhere. While funding for 4-H positions has remained stable, there is also an increase in the utilization of para-professionals in program delivery. Further study is needed regarding satisfaction and retention of 4-H youth development professionals and in examining the link between the academic preparation and training of 4-H youth workers and positive youth development outcomes.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



Introduction

Professional youth workers are one of the least understood and studied fields in the human services arena. In fact, although several million professionals are estimated to work in youth development, the Annie E. Casey Foundation¹ observed that—

“Youth services is the least documented, least understood and probably the most varied field we studied. There is no national data set on youth workers, or on youth-serving programs....Much of the data are unreliable and often inaccurate...the lack of good information about youth workers and what they do stands in sharp contrast to the documented benefits of youth programs.”

Several recent studies about salaries and benefits of working in human services produce a picture that “is both uplifting and depressing.”² Youth workers are typically passionate about their mission and their work, but routinely are not provided with adequate compensation to make youth work a viable, long-term career. For example, a recent study of 1,053 youth workers in eight urban communities found a median salary of about \$25,500. This study also found that 40 percent of those surveyed needed to work a second job just to make ends meet.³ Such conditions led one expert to comment recently that “human services delivery is reaching a state of crisis.”⁴

While youth work often offers the advantage of flexible work hours, it is also an increasingly demanding field with expectations about skills and abilities that are not met with adequate pay. Most agree—youth work is becoming more complex and demanding, in large part due to technology, government reporting requirements and the complicated issues youth themselves bring to youth program settings. How does 4-H compare?

Extension’s 4-H Youth Professionals

Despite its connection to federal, state and county government, with concomitant images of data collection and reports, Extension 4-H youth work is not a well-documented occupation. Clearly, 4-H has the most extensive network of paid professionals than any other out-of-school youth development program, yet the specific nature and composition of this network are not well-known.

¹The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2003). The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform: The Condition of the Frontline Human Services Workforce. Baltimore, MD: author, p. 12. Available at: http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/advocasey_spring04.pdf

²Boyle, P. (2006). The high passion and low pay of youth work. Youth Today, 15:9. (October) p. 22.

³Yohalem, N., Pittman, K, and Moore, D. (2006 July). Growing the Next Generation of Youth Work Professionals: Workforce Opportunities and Challenges. Houston, TX: Cornerstones for Kids. Available on-line at: http://www.cornerstones4kids.org/images/next_gen_final_reportRW1.pdf

⁴Light, P. (2003 March). The Health of the Human Services Workforce. New York, NY: The Center for Public Service, Brookings Institution and the Wagner School of Public Service, New York University. Available on-line at: <http://www.brookings.edu/gs/cps/humanservices.pdf>



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Like other youth work organizations, 4-H has done more to document (appropriately, it might be added) the impacts of its program on its participants rather than telling the story of its professionals. Given this reality, it has become evident that some benchmark data about 4-H staff and staffing structures is critically needed for adapting to a changing environment.

Now that other studies have begun to paint a more complete picture of youth workers, it became evident that it was also time to collect some benchmark data about the 4-H system—from county, state and national levels. The current study was designed to learn more about how state 4-H programs are staffed, to develop an overall profile of the 4-H workforce across the nation, and to gain some insights from 4-H administrators as to their views on the "best" staffing structures that support positive youth development outcomes and future challenges.

Some have speculated that there has been a shift in 4-H staffing at the state and county levels. It is widely believed that programs that were once led by Extension 4-H faculty and staff with undergraduate and graduate degrees are now more likely to be led by para-professionals or program assistants (or other titles) who may have high school diploma or hold an associate's degree from a two-year college (see Appendix for definitions of specific positions).

Unfortunately, 4-H youth development specifically, and youth work in general, are already perceived by some as merely "child's play" that can be done by anyone without any specific training or expertise required.^{5,6} Such misconceptions devalue youth work as a profession and imply that specialized training is unnecessary to everyday work, let alone necessary to achieving positive youth development outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

These and other concerns led to an effort to survey all states about current staffing structures that could establish some important baseline data. Information collected from such a survey could inform future directions in 4-H staffing and strengthen program outcomes.

The purpose of this internet-based survey was to help gather baseline information about current and past staffing patterns, degree requirements and compensation levels of 4-H professionals in each state in order to understand any shifts in staffing responsibilities and emphases since 1990. This benchmark year was selected because the downsizing from the mid-1980's farm and bank crises were behind Extension, and 1990 was before funding from the Federal Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) program began which resulted in increased funding for soft-funded staff positions.

⁵Astroth, K.A. (2003). Doorway, doormat or doghouse? The challenges facing 4-H youth development scholarship in land-grant universities. *Journal of Extension*, 41:6. Available on-line at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2003december/comm1.shtml>



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

1. What is the current staffing structure in place in each state?
2. What is the current staffing structure in place within districts (if applicable) and counties in each state?
3. How do current staffing structures compare with staffing in 1990?
4. What degree requirements exist for 4-H youth workers at various levels of the system?
5. How are 4-H professionals compensated across the system?
6. Are the degree expectations the same or different for 4-H youth workers compared to other Extension professionals?
7. What fields of study or disciplines are the best preparation for youth work in 4-H?
8. What is the best staff configuration for supporting 4-H youth development?

Methodology

An expert panel of Extension 4-H youth professionals was assembled to help identify and refine appropriate questions for the on-line survey. This group consisted of two CSREES 4-H national program leaders, a state 4-H program leader, county Extension agents and specialists (see Acknowledgements section on page 2).

During the summer of 2006, this panel provided feedback and suggestions to question construction and wording. Several versions of the survey were shared with the expert panel until all felt that the survey was ready for dissemination.

The study was posted on SurveyMonkey® for a period of about four weeks. Responses were tracked weekly and noted until all 50 states had provided responses to the questions (a response rate of 100 percent). Initially, missing states were contacted and encouraged to complete the survey.

The survey instrument consisted of a mixture of multiple choice questions and open-ended questions. Unfinished surveys could be completed by each respondent at a later date, and only one completed survey per person was allowed.

Findings

Findings from this survey were compiled and analyzed in October and November of 2006. These findings are reported in eight major categories—a profile of the respondents, current 4-H staffing structures, staffing trends and changes, academic degree requirements, compensation levels, academic and other preparation for youth work, ideal staffing models, and challenges to 4-H staffing. Let's now turn to the findings in each of these areas.



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Profile of Respondents

The largest group of state leaders who participated in the survey are relatively new to their roles.

- ✿ More than one third (37 percent) had been state leaders for only 3-5 years
- ✿ Another quarter (24 percent) had been in their position less than 2 years
- ✿ Twenty percent had 6-10 years of experience as program leaders
- ✿ Eight percent had 11-15 years of administrative experience, and
- ✿ Twelve percent had more than 16 years of experience

Recommendation:

The 4-H system must invest in training of new state 4-H program leaders. Nearly two-thirds have been in their roles only a short period of time. 4-H program leaders with much longer tenure should be involved as mentors and coaches.

Academic Credentials of State 4-H Program Administrators

Those in state 4-H program leader positions tended to have doctoral degrees themselves.

- ✿ Sixty-one percent had earned a terminal degree
- ✿ A third (33 percent) had earned a master's degree

Half of the states (51 percent) require a doctoral degree to be a state 4-H program administrator.

Current Staffing Structures

State 4-H Office Staffs

Several questions probed the number of state staff FTEs as well as numbers of actual staff as one means of gauging program size—both in hard and soft-funded positions.

- ✿ Total state staff FTE numbers ranged from a low of 0.25 to a high of 21.
- ✿ Total FTEs (both hard and soft-funded positions) at the state office level for all respondents was 399.35. The average number of FTEs per state office is about 8, while the median was 7.

Key Finding:

State 4-H program administrators are highly educated and at least half have earned the highest degree offered in the university system.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



The survey also collected information about program coordinators at the state office level. Of those responding to the survey, 30 percent indicated that they did not have any FTEs in such a position at the state level, while 30 percent said they had one. Nearly twenty percent (10 states) said they had at least 2 FTEs for program coordinators.

District/Area 4-H Staffs

A layer of programming common in some states is a district, area or regional structure. The purpose of such structures is to provide for decentralized support to county programs. Our survey found that--

- ✿ 76 percent (40 states) reported that they had no such structure in their states
- ✿ Those that had such a level in their system (a total of 10 states) reported widely different structures
 - o Eight percent (4 states) reported having a total of 4 FTEs dedicated to 4-H program leadership at the district or area level
 - o Four states reported having 10 or more FTEs at the district or area level⁷

Key Finding:
 Across the nation, state 4-H headquarters are well-staffed with a strong core of professionals to give leadership to knowledge-development and program leadership.

Key Finding:
 District or regional structures are relatively uncommon across the entire system. Beyond the county office, support typically emanates from the state 4-H headquarters.

When it comes to program coordinators, again the majority of states do not have a district level of programming in their system, so only 10 states reported on these positions. Of those responding,

- ✿ 7 states have no such positions in their district/regional offices
- ✿ One state has 3 program coordinators at the district level
- ✿ One state reported that it had 5 district program coordinators/program assistants.

Key Finding:
 Program coordinators are still a relatively uncommon phenomenon at the state level. Some states, though, have several of these positions which focus on events and activities management so that higher-degreed faculty can focus on curriculum and program leadership.

⁷Note: Feedback during the data collection process indicated that in one state, at least, this term was confusing. In Missouri, field faculty often have multiple county assignments and are called Regional Specialists but they are not really at a middle level of staffing. They have county responsibilities in multiple counties.



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



County 4-H Educators

Extension programming is thought of as primarily delivered at the county level, so not surprisingly 95 percent of states (47) reported having a county-based system in their Extension network. Most (67 percent, or 32 states) have an Extension presence in all counties in their states, but the remainder of states lack an Extension presence in just a small number of counties. In most instances, even where there is no Extension office in a county, there is an Extension presence either through a neighboring county or an Extension 4-H program led by volunteers.

In response to a question about the number of full-time 4-H positions (people who work 100 percent in 4-H youth development), the total number of such positions across the entire system amounted to 1,975 people. When asked how many total county or parish FTEs are dedicated to 4-H programming, this number grew to 2,801.66 because many agents have multiple programmatic responsibilities of which 4-H is just one of several.⁸ These staff numbers can be compared to the 3,066 counties in the nation.

Implication:

Extension 4-H has an unmatched capacity to deliver programs and initiatives that is unparalleled among youth organizations or agencies.

When asked about the existence of program coordinators/program assistants, this type of position was more common at the county level than at either the district or the state level. Forty-four states indicated that they had these positions at the county level, ranging from a low of one such position to a high of nearly 80 FTEs. When asked about how many FTEs at the county or parish level are filled by 4-H program assistants, para-professionals or program coordinators, the total across the entire system was reported as 1,060.

Key Finding:

4-H program assistants represent about one-third of 4-H staff working at the local level.

⁸This question specifically asked respondents to include all agents with only partial responsibilities for 4-H programming—like single county agents or multi-county agents who give leadership to 4-H in addition to agriculture, community development and family & consumer sciences.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



Staffing Trends and Shifts

State Level Trends

One of the key questions asked on the survey was about current hard-dollar state 4-H program FTEs in comparison to 1990.

- ✿ 58 percent of the states replying indicated that their state staff was smaller than in 1990
- ✿ 28 percent of the states indicated that they had more FTEs now than in 1990
- ✿ Nine percent had remained the same
- ✿ Four percent did not know if state staff size had changed over the past 16 years

When soft-funded positions were examined—

- ✿ More than one-third of states reported no soft-money positions at the state level.
- ✿ Another 28% indicated that they had only one such position
- ✿ 17 percent reported that two such positions existed in their state office
- ✿ 9 percent reported that 3 such positions existed
- ✿ Two states reported that they had 6 such positions on their state staffs
- ✿ One state reported having more than 10 soft-funded FTE positions

Key Finding:
Soft-money positions at the state 4-H headquarters are relatively uncommon with half reporting no such positions or only one. These kinds of positions may increase, however, if hard dollar sources decline.

Challenge:
Soft money positions may become more common as sources of hard dollar funding decline. Will the system be ready to hire short-term, soft-funded staff?

County Level Trends

In response to how current county staffing levels compare to those in 1990, some states reported having more FTEs because of increased funding, but other states reported having fewer FTEs because of funding cuts.

- ✿ Forty-eight percent of states have seen a decline in the number of FTEs dedicated to 4-H programming
- ✿ 28 percent have seen an increase in the number of 4-H FTEs since 1990.
- ✿ Fifteen percent reported that they have stayed the same.
- ✿ 9 percent were not sure

When counting people rather than FTEs, over half (54 percent) of the states reported declines in 4-H agent numbers whereas nearly a third (30 percent) reported that the number of 4-H agent positions had increased since 1990. About 11 percent had stayed the same, and 3 percent did not know.

When surveyed about the number of para-professional positions,

- ✿ In 56 percent of the states, the number of para-professional positions has increased at the county level since 1990
- ✿ In 13 percent of states the number of such positions had stayed the same
- ✿ In another 13 percent of states there has been a decline in such positions
- ✿ 17 percent weren't sure about the shift in such positions



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



The total number of FTEs reportedly filled by program coordinators, para-professionals or program assistants was reported as 1,060.

Reasons for the shifts in staffing (both increased and decreased) varied from state to state. For instance, some states reported that early retirements, buyouts, downsizing, reclassification, and lost state or county dollars accounted for the declines in staffing numbers. One respondent's comment is illustrative: "Because of decreased state and federal funding, we have replaced many former 100% 4-H agent positions with program assistants." Another respondent observed how critical funding is to staffing: "4-H staffing decreased for a period of time due to lost state dollars; now increasing due to restored state dollars and more leveraged county dollars."

In other cases, staff increases were attributed to administrative vision and leadership, implementation of strategic plans, realignment of FTEs from administrative to county positions, or other restructuring moves that led to increased staffing for 4-H. One respondent, for example, reported that the Extension Director "has established a goal of placing a full-time 4-H agent in all counties with a population of 30,000 or more. Currently we are eight counties short of this goal."

There has been a suggestion that the declines in fully-funded academic positions at the state, district and county levels have been due, in part, to an increase in program coordinators or assistants. According to respondents, the number of county agent positions has largely declined since 1990, while the number of program assistants has increased. However, the precise reasons for these changes are not known from this survey of states.

Challenge:

How will the system continue to offer high quality programs if academic credentials of 4-H staff decline?

Academic Degree Requirements

Another purpose of the study was to learn more about the degree requirements for various positions within state Extension programs.

State Level

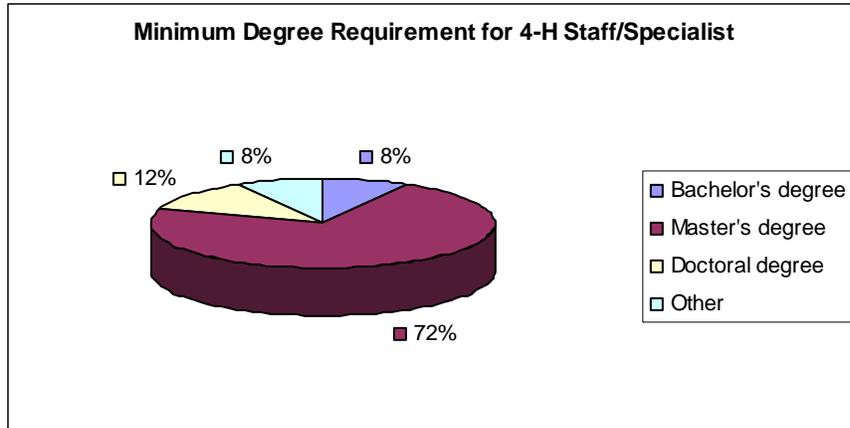
The vast majority of states require at least a master's degree to work on the state 4-H staff.

- ✿ 72 percent of states require a master's degree as a minimum requirement
- ✿ 13 percent require a doctoral degree—some at the time of hire, but others within 6 years of employment
- ✿ 4 states (8 percent of the total) reported that only a bachelor's degree was necessary to work on the state staff

In general, program coordinators have earned only a bachelor's degree. Interestingly, two states reported having no 4-H specialists of any kind at the state 4-H office level. In one state, such specialists are housed in another entity and focus primarily on research and instruction and have no programming responsibilities.



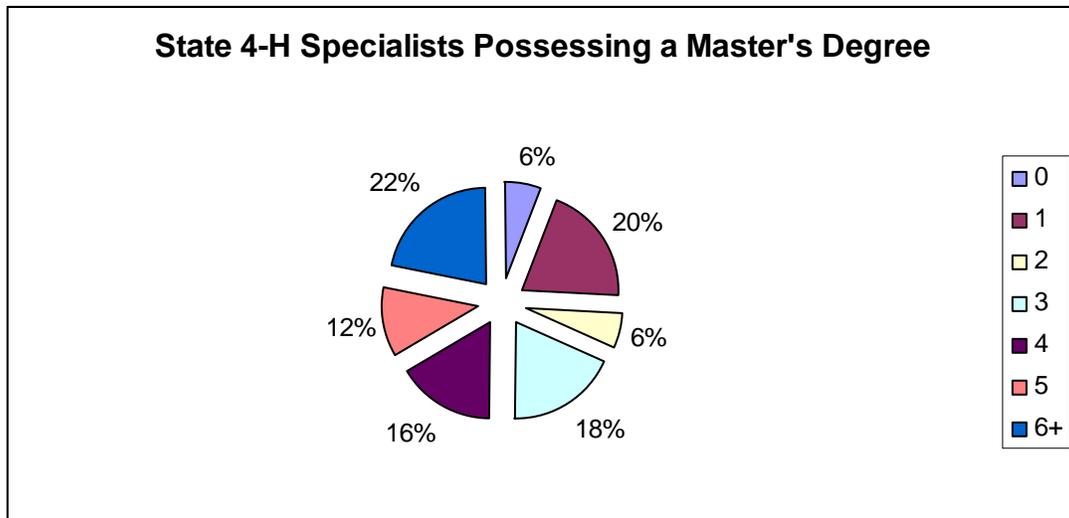
Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



When it comes down to numbers of individuals with different academic credentials, our survey revealed the following:

- 🍀 28 percent of states (14) have at least one person on the state staff with a doctoral degree
- 🍀 7 states have no one with such a terminal degree
- 🍀 Thirteen percent have 2 people with doctoral degrees
- 🍀 4 states (7 percent) have 6 or more faculty on staff with a doctoral degree

For those with master's degrees, 22 percent of states reported having 6 or more individuals with this academic degree on the state staff.





Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Key Finding:

4-H has a highly-educated workforce helps contribute to high standards and positive educational impacts.

District/Regional Level

While only 13 states reported having a district or area-type structure for 4-H specialists, most require a master's degree for this level of work. In fact, 69 percent (9 states) require a master's degree while four states require only a bachelor's degree.

Key Finding:

Even though few states have a district or area level of program delivery, degree requirements are high and most require at least a master's degree for working at this level of the system. This can contribute to higher educational impacts at the district level.

County 4-H Educators

Nearly two-thirds of the states (58 percent) require a bachelor's degree as the minimum to work as a county agent. Thirty-seven percent require a master's degree, and no states require a doctorate degree for this level of work. Interestingly, two states have no minimum degree requirements to work as a county 4-H agent. One state mentioned that their county agents were considered "assistants, not educators."

In one state, New Jersey, county staffing is quite different from other states. County agents are those with master's degrees and 3 years of experience to start. A program "associate" is someone with a bachelor's degree and 2 years of experience to start. A program assistant is a county-hired para-professional who usually has a bachelor's degree. Salaries for each are different.

This study also sought to learn if the degree requirements for doing 4-H youth development were different between the 1862, 1890 and 1994 land-grant universities in each state (see the Appendix for an explanation of the differences between these types of institutions). In about half of the states, there are no other land-grant universities than the 1862 institution. However, in the others, 11 percent of respondents reported that the degree expectations were different for Extension agent positions at the other land grant institutions. However, 24 percent said there were no differences in degree requirements between institutions. Another 17 percent did not know for certain if there were any differences in degree requirements between the institutions.

Key Finding:

Ninety-five percent of states require a bachelor's degree to be a 4-H youth development professional.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:

**Recommendation:**

The 4-H system should work towards greater uniformity and consistency of titles so that there is a common understanding among our clientele about staffing positions. Consistent titles would also enhance portability of skills for staff as they move from one state to another.

Challenge:

Because of college degree requirements, Extension will continue to be challenged to recruit minority—particularly Native American—staff with advanced degrees in rural and isolated communities.

Implication:

The inconsistency of titles and degree expectations in 4-H youth development creates confusion and contributes to a lack of consistency of standards and competencies needed in 4-H youth work at various levels of the system.

Challenge:

Youth development involvement is not uniformly expected of all Extension staff. How will the system ensure broad impact if some agents are not expected to work with a significant portion of the Extension audience?

When queried about whether there were degree differences between 4-H and other Extension positions in states, 87 percent said there were no differences in academic standards between 4-H and other positions. However, 11 percent (5 states) indicated that there were different academic degree expectations in their states between 4-H and other county Extension agents.

Because so many states have single or two-agent county staff configurations, we wanted to learn more about how 4-H programming duties were distributed in the system. Hence, we asked about whether all Extension agents, regardless of their primary responsibilities, had expectations from Extension administration to work in 4-H programming. In about half the states (53 percent), the answer was yes. But in 47 percent of the states, the answer was no. Three states skipped this question.

Key Finding:

In 87 percent of states, 4-H professionals are on par with colleagues in other disciplines with respect to academic requirements.

Implication:

Variability of degree requirements may perpetuate the perception that 4-H faculty are not on equal footing with their other Extension colleagues.



Staffing, Structures and Salaries

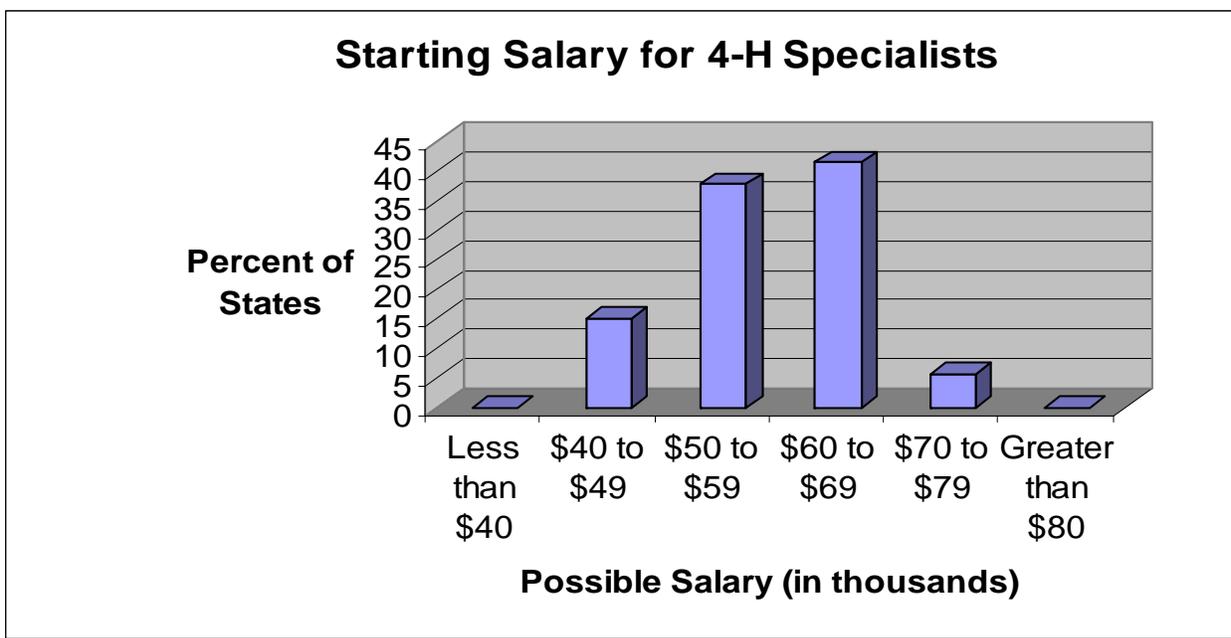


Compensation

Low compensation levels in youth work have been a concern for many years.⁹ Thus, several survey questions sought to collect information about current salary levels for various 4-H positions.

State 4-H Specialists

There was a high degree of consistency across the system in terms of compensation for state 4-H specialists, as indicated in figure below.



As this table indicates, the majority of states are paying similar levels for specialists with a doctorate, although 3 states are providing significantly higher levels of compensation.

Key Finding:

Salary levels remain fairly consistent across the nation. By comparison, 4-H professionals, are better paid than their colleagues in other youth development programs.

⁹ Boyle, 2006.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



As one might expect, state specialists with master's degrees are typically paid less than state specialists with doctoral degrees. For example,

- ✿ 13 percent of states (6) pay less than \$40,000 to state specialists with only a master's degree
- ✿ The majority of states (51 percent) pay specialists with a master's degree \$40,000 to \$49,999 per year
- ✿ 30 percent (16 states) pay their master's degreed specialists \$50,000 to \$59,999
- ✿ Three states pay more than \$60,000 to specialists with a master's degree

District/Regional Specialists

Since 75 percent of states do not have regional or district levels of program leadership, salary levels were not as consistent across the system as they were with state specialists.

- ✿ Six states pay less than \$40,000 per year for their district specialists
- ✿ 3 states pay between \$40,000 and \$49,999
- ✿ Four states pay more than \$50,000 to their district or area specialists

County 4-H Educators

Not surprisingly, county-based 4-H youth workers are paid typically less than district or state specialists.

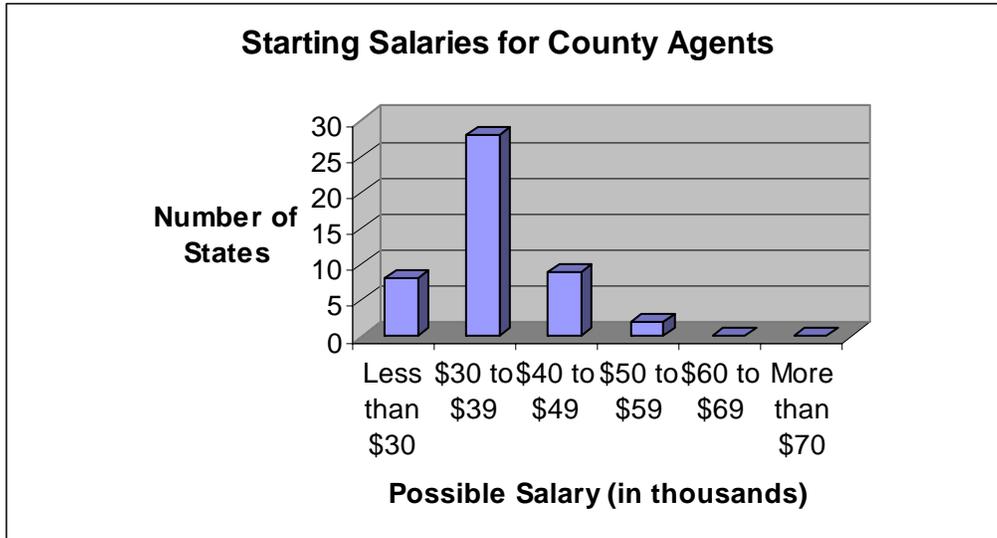
- ✿ Nearly two-thirds of states (60 percent) pay \$30,000 to \$39,999 per year to county educators
- ✿ 17 percent pay less than \$30,000 per year
- ✿ 19 percent pay \$40,000 to \$49,999
- ✿ Two states pay county educators more than \$50,000 per year

Key Finding:

County 4-H professionals are compensated at higher levels than most youth development professionals, and 4-H professionals' salary ranges are relatively consistent across the nation.



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Program Coordinators/Assistants

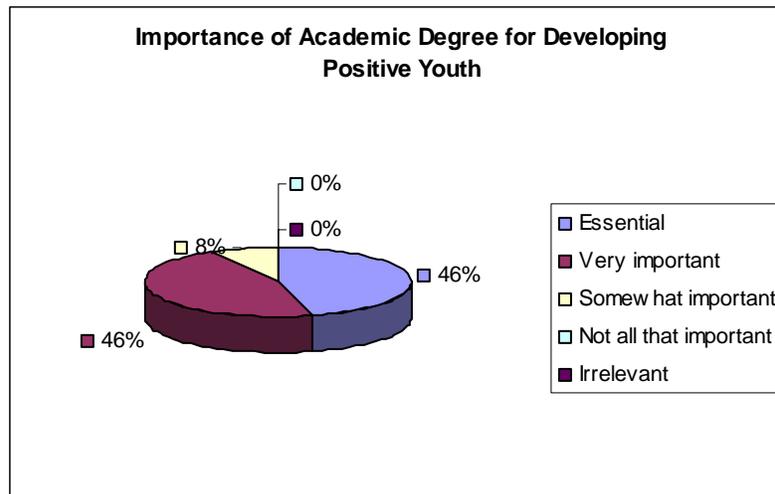
While one-third of states do not have 4-H program coordinators, those that did pay them at a comparable level to county 4-H educators. Twenty-four percent of states pay 4-H program coordinators \$30,000 to \$34,999, while 18 percent pay \$35,000 to \$39,999. In a few states, program coordinators are pay \$40,000 to \$50,000 per year.

Academic and Other Preparation

Another section of the survey surveyed respondents about their opinions as to the fields of study and practical experience that would provide the best preparation for working in youth development. A significant portion (43 percent) felt that an academic degree was “essential” to ensuring positive youth development outcomes. Another 49 percent said that a degree was “very important.” About 8 percent said that a degree was “somewhat important.” No one said that an academic degree was “irrelevant.”



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



The disciplines which state program leaders felt provided the best preparation for youth work were—

- ✿ Education--98 percent
- ✿ Human development—94 percent
- ✿ Child development—90 percent
- ✿ Psychology—31 percent
- ✿ Animal science—29 percent
- ✿ Speech communications—20 percent

Recommendation:

4-H should build stronger ties to education, human development and child development and seek to introduce youth development principles and approaches into university coursework.

Other than academics, state 4-H leaders indicated that the following were areas where other skills were important for working in 4-H youth development:

- ✿ Experience working with youth and volunteers
- ✿ Conflict resolution
- ✿ Communications skills/process skills
- ✿ Youth development
- ✿ Program management/organization

Internships were commonly mentioned as valuable training experiences and preparation for working in 4-H youth development.



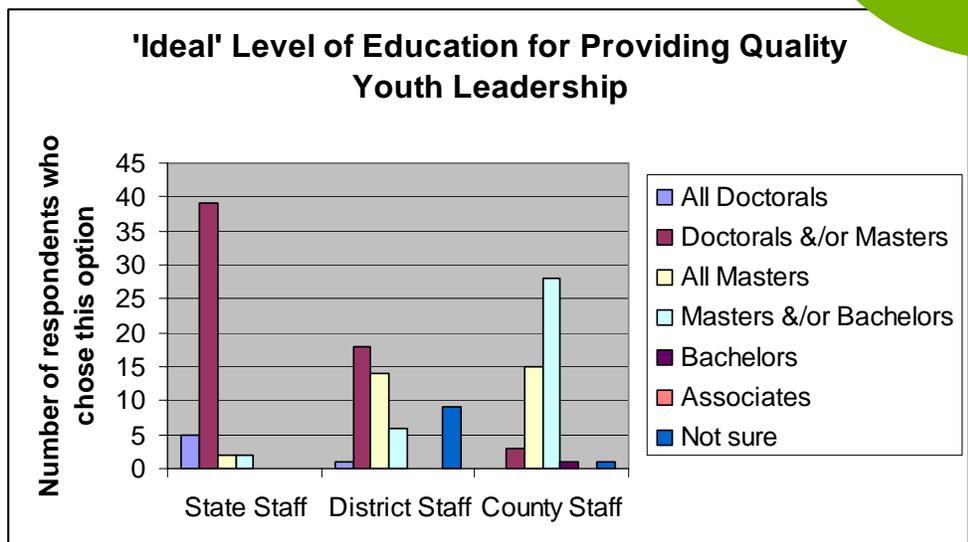
Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Best Staffing Models

Finally, respondents were asked to weigh in on what they felt, from their experience, was the “best” staffing configuration for a modern 4-H program, at least with respect to degree requirements. The figure below provides an overview of their responses.

Key Finding:
Preparation for working in 4-H youth development needs to include both academic coursework and practical field experience, combining both the “art” and “science” of youth work.



Challenges to 4-H Staffing

The final question on the survey asked “what is the biggest challenge related to 4-H staffing in your state?” This question was an opportunity to solicit open-ended responses from state leaders about what they saw in the future.

The most common response to this question was lack of adequate funding—17 state program leaders (34 percent) indicated this as a significant challenge. Cuts in state budgets, the difficulty of finding new funding for agent positions, lack of adequate county funding, the inability to offer competitive salaries to qualified candidates, lack of a career ladder, lack of administrative support for 4-H—all were mentioned as challenges to 4-H staffing for the future. One respondent, for example, commented that a significant challenge was “building the case for 4-H specialist staff as compared to Ag specialist staff.”

In several cases, the lack of adequate specialist staff to support county agents was listed as a challenge to 4-H staffing. Some states, as we saw in the findings from the survey, have no 4-H specialists at the state level. This lack of critical mass to provide leadership at the state level for program and organizational support, as well as knowledge development, continues to be a significant challenge to leading a modern 4-H program in the 21st century.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



Next Steps and Future Directions

The findings from this first wave effort to map 4-H youth development staffing in Extension has collected a wealth of useful information that suggest a number of directions for the future and implications. Like other studies, there is cause of celebration, and yet also areas for concern.

Critical Issue #1: Salaries and Compensation

Youth workers in Extension tend to fall into the same consistent ranges across the system. In comparison to youth workers in private or non-profit organizations, Extension youth workers, as employees of public agencies, are generally compensated at higher levels. The average annual salary of youth workers in the non-profit arena is estimated at \$26,000¹⁰ while the salary for Extension youth workers is \$30,000 to \$39,999. Some states even pay more. These facts should give us a competitive edge for recruiting, attracting, and retaining youth development professionals.

However, some states are very low in compensation while a few are at the high end. Still, level of education, geography and organizational size all affect salaries, according to recent studies.¹¹ These factors are clearly true in Extension as well. The only viable career ladder in 4-H youth work still seems to be in moving to another state or to another county within the same state. But, states could retain their existing trained youth workforce if they could figure out how to provide viable career ladders and graduated salary structures.

Recommendation:

Each state should examine their career ladders for 4-H youth workers and identify clear avenues for retaining and re-training highly skilled and valued 4-H professionals.

Critical Issue #2: Professional Status of 4-H Professionals

4-H youth workers have made significant gains over the years to attain equal status with other Extension professionals. 4-H professionals are no longer considered “assistant agents” and 4-H is selected as a viable long-term career choice in itself rather than as a stepping stone to another position. Since the 1984 study of the 4-H professional, important changes have occurred in the professionalization of 4-H youth workers.¹²

¹⁰Light, 2003.

¹¹Boyle, p. 22.

¹²Gerhard, G. W. (1984). The image of the 4-H professional. *News & Views*, 37:5. pp. 4-8.



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Yet, 4-H professionals in some states still struggle to attain equal status in the eyes of Extension colleagues and administrators. As our findings revealed, some states do not require a post-secondary degree for county Extension agents, in a few states they are not identified as educators, and several states indicated that professional or academic status still eludes 4-H professionals. One respondent remarked that the biggest challenge to 4-H staffing was the continuation of a “caste system—no consistent titles, requirements or training.” Another was equally direct: “Recognizing youth development as an academic discipline” is the biggest challenge. Highly trained, academically-qualified youth work professionals are essential, especially in urban centers, to providing high-quality programs that can document impacts and change the image of youth work as merely “child’s play.”

McDowell pointed out as much in his book about Extension and the land-grant universities. For a long time, McDowell observed,

“There were no unique qualifications to be a 4-H agent.... The ‘bottom of the totem pole’ position of 4-H within extension is emblematic of children at the bottom in society generally, not making economic contributions and requiring a lot of work that is not valued because it is unpaid.”¹³

At one time, he writes, 4-H agents knew “more about the animals it teaches kids to raise than it does about the kids.”¹⁴ But even McDowell recognizes that this is changing and that 4-H staff are now being hired based on their qualifications to do the job and their focus on youth development.¹⁵ Yet, recent efforts to emphasize the importance of youth development competencies must still deal with this legacy and some residual history embraced by some Extension administrators. The good news is that this is changing and becoming a minority viewpoint.

Currently, there is broad national discussion about credentialing youth workers and professionalizing the youth work field. With its connection to universities and its expansive network of youth professionals in nearly every county of the nation, Extension can and should lead this discussion. If youth development lacks academic respect on campuses and is not given recognition as a discipline or field of study, Extension also has the ability—more than any other organization—to change this situation in academia.

Recommendation:

Extension 4-H must get more involved in national level discussions and forums related to credentialing and certification of youth development professionals.

Recommendation:

Extension and 4-H should focus its energy and communication on legitimizing the field of youth work at each of our land-grant institutions.

¹³McDowell, G. R. (2001). Land-Grant Universities and Extension into the 21st Century: Negotiating or Abandoning a Social Contract. Ames: Iowa State University Press. p. 157.

¹⁴McDowell, p. 157.

¹⁵McDowell, p. 158.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



Critical Issue #3: Strengthening the Credentials of 4-H Professionals

Our findings suggest that the belief that there has been an erosion in the professional ranks of 4-H youth workers is accurate. A number of states reported that academic, professional educator positions have been slowly replaced with activity managers or program assistants. One respondent mentioned “keeping educator positions” as a challenge to current staffing. This erosion of professional/degreed positions appears to be more pronounced at the county level rather than at the state or district level. But it is at the county/parish level where frontline youth work occurs and where educational impacts can be best documented.

At a time when youth work is becoming more complex and challenging, Extension needs to take measures to increase, rather than decrease, the academic and career preparation standards for frontline 4-H youth workers. A recent study of all professional workers in Montana found that most youth workers had good access to the tools that would help them do their job (e.g. computers, internet, phones, fax, etc.), but training and compensation still seemed to be significant challenges.¹⁶

Recommendation:

Continue to advocate for and support high academic standards and career preparation opportunities (like apprenticeship programs) for youth workers, particularly in urban areas where the pools of talent are greatest.

Critical Issue #4: Increasing the Number of County 4-H Staff

While 4-H has the benefit of one of the largest cohesive group of youth professionals, there are limits to how much they can do. The size and scope of the 4-H system is enviable, and potential partners for advancing positive youth development can have a high level of assurance that the 4-H network can reach millions of youth quickly through its hundreds of thousands of volunteers like no other group can.

Given the current discussion to double the number of youth in 4-H clubs nationwide, there must also be a related effort to increase the number of 4-H youth development staff—both professional and volunteer.

Given the reports of burnout and excessive workloads in the greater youth field already, ways must be found to expand the ranks of professional youth workers and volunteers working in 4-H. Adding more work to the existing staff will potentially increase staff turnover. As the recent Brookings Institute study found that in the human services, 70 percent of those in their survey strongly or somewhat agreed that they “always have too much work to do.”¹⁷

¹⁶Astroth, K.A. (2006). More Than Child’s Play: A Profile of Professional Youth Workers in Montana. Bozeman, MT: Montana 4-H Center for Youth Development.

¹⁷Light, 2003.



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



This view was supported in the open-ended comments of several state 4-H program leaders. As one wrote: “It is amazing how much we get done in 4-H Youth Development with such a small staff.” Similar comments surfaced in the recent Alaska 4-H Program Review Final Report.¹⁸

Recommendation:

Extension should seek ways to expand the ranks of professional 4-H youth workers at various levels of the system in order to extend the reach and impact of 4-H programming.

Critical Issue #5: Investments in State Staff Faculty Must Be Increased

A critical element in leading a modern 4-H program is the support provided by the state 4-H office. Program leadership, knowledge development (through research and synthesis) and knowledge dissemination are keys to ensuring that 4-H remains relevant and on the cutting edge of best practices.

As our survey revealed, there are several states that have very small or non-existent specialist staff supporting county field faculty. Overall, the ratio of state 4-H specialists to county field faculty is 1-to-5. In addition, the majority of states reported that their state 4-H staffs were smaller than 15 years ago. Only about a third reported higher numbers of FTEs at the state level.

The ratio of state staff to field staff is much lower in 4-H youth work than in other program areas of Extension, especially as compared to agriculture. If Extension provides knowledge-based education, then there must be a congruent investment in “knowledge development” at the state 4-H level by investing in specialist and research staff to support field faculty. In those states where there are no 4-H specialists, or a very small number compared to county 4-H agents, it is difficult to imagine how the 4-H program can remain viable. State 4-H staff can help generate new knowledge, synthesize research and serve in a leadership capacity for 4-H on the state level. As McDowell observes: “Investment on the campus in support of programs is very important.”¹⁹ Some states are not maintaining this investment.

Recommendation:

In those states where state 4-H staff size has declined, Extension must reverse this trend and invest in a core staff consistent with the average size of 8 found around the rest of the nation.

¹⁸Alaska 4-H Program Review—Final Report. (2006). Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska

¹⁹McDowell, (2001), p. 152.



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



Critical Issue #6: Retention and Turnover

Several states commented on the high rates of turnover they experienced in 4-H positions. Turnover and retention are common themes in the youth development field, but there are some specific issues with Extension that have implications for both the short and long-term future. Several states commented on a “generational shift” in 4-H ranks—losing a large number of “baby boomers” to retirement and the positions not being re-filled. Another remarked that “I have no staff under the age of 40 so I will have a huge mass retirement over the next 5 years.”

In some states, the high cost of living and remote rural locations make it difficult or impossible to find qualified applicants who will accept positions. States like Hawaii, in particular, are challenged in finding degreed applicants who can afford the high cost of living, especially for housing. As a result, positions often remain vacant for years, placing an increased workload on existing staff.

This first wave study did not examine job satisfaction issues, turnover or retention strategies, however. We highly recommend that the next phase of this work include questions to examine these issues in 4-H youth development work. The common impression is that there is high turnover and burnout in 4-H work—just as in other youth work fields.

Recommendation:

Because of generational changes that are occurring, each state must make significant investments in orientation, training, mentoring and succession planning as they lose a critical mass of youth workers who have provided stability and continuity over the years.

Recommendation:

Many states will be losing experienced state 4-H program leaders, and others have relatively new state 4-H program leaders. Investments in training and coaching for new administrators is critical to supporting the strong legacy that 4-H has developed.

Critical Issue #7: Balancing Program Management and Education

From our study, there are still challenges to 4-H youth professionals who must live in an academic environment and yet must manage a broad array of educational events and activities. It is a challenge to excel in both of these arenas, and often the day-to-day expectations and immediate demands of program management take precedence over academic, educational responsibilities. Several respondents mentioned the “activity trap” which keeps talented and skilled 4-H professionals from engaging in scholarly work to advance the field of youth development. One individual specifically commented that his challenge was “creating and delivering a 4-H youth development program that addresses the needs of 21st century youth who live in a world of technology and fast-paced educational experiences.”



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Recommendation:

All states are encouraged to reference the 4-H Professional Research Knowledge and Competencies (PRKC, 2004) in job announcements and job descriptions. Including these competencies would help identify and give priority to youth development skills necessary for success.

Conclusion

This first national study of 4-H staffing structures and patterns has provided some much-needed benchmark information about current 4-H staffing and some trend analysis since 1990. While the erosion in professional positions within 4-H is not as great as some may have suspected, the current study shows that there has been a decline in the number of FTEs at the state level in most states. About one in 10 states have stayed the same size, but notably nearly 30 percent have experienced growth. Factors in this growth have been re-alignments, administrative leadership, and improved budgets.

Still, Extension 4-H youth development provides one of the most extensive networks of youth professionals of any organization in the nation. Our staff is highly trained, well-paid and supported. Few others can lay claim to having such a reach and impact as 4-H can.

However, there has been a shift to hiring more program assistants and coordinators at the county level to replace Extension agents with a bachelor's or master's degree. In some states, the impetus for this shift may be due, in part, from financial considerations. As pointed out above, in about one-fourth of states, program assistants are paid, on average, \$5,000 to \$10,000 less than degreed agent educators. Yet, there must be something more at play since in other states program assistants are paid nearly at par with degreed agents. More investigation in this area is clearly needed.

Finally, the program impact of these staffing changes on youth development outcomes is not known. Future studies should examine the link between the academic preparation and training of 4-H youth workers and positive youth development outcomes—a call that was voiced in the National 4-H Research Response Task Force report of 2003.²⁰ In addition, future efforts should examine job satisfaction, retention and turnover within 4-H professional ranks.

²⁰Blyth, D.A. & Borden, L.M. (2003). Stimulating Research, Promoting Youth Development: Final Report of the National Youth Development Research Response Initiative. Minneapolis: Center for 4-H Youth Development, University of Minnesota Extension Service. Available on-line at: www.fourh.umn.edu/NYDDRI/



Understanding the 4-H Workforce:



APPENDIX

Definitions

All state 4-H programs are different, and titles and position descriptions vary widely. In some states, the same title might mean different things and connote a different status. For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were employed. There was common agreement amongst most states, and so this list provides a useful reference and common language for 4-H positions across the system.

State 4-H Program Leader—these individuals serve as the program administrators for 4-H programs within each state. Sometimes called directors, they provide overall 4-H leadership and provide supervision over the state 4-H office personnel. Typically, these individuals are 100 percent administrative but may have a few programmatic responsibilities. They often are considered to be like department heads.

State-level Staff/Specialist—this person typically works with the state 4-H office/center and has state-wide job expectations, they may live elsewhere in the state and not necessarily be housed at the land-grant college. Such a person usually has a terminal degree, but might also have a master's level degree at a minimum. Responsibilities may include developing curriculum, providing program leadership or subject matter duties, teaching others (including agents, volunteers and youth), program development, evaluation, etc. Such a person performs primarily an educational role although event management may comprise some of their time. There may be certain positions that are called "specialist" but which do not perform these functions--such as a food service director or conference center director. This category does not include these types of non-teaching positions even though they may be titled as "specialists." State 4-H program leaders should not be included in this category either. This category does not include support staff or secretarial staff.

Area/Regional/District Specialist--these types of individuals usually have geographically-determined responsibilities for 4-H, supporting agents, volunteers and leaders through teaching, program development, implementation and evaluation. These individuals could have a terminal degree, but also might possess a master's degree (at a minimum). Like state 4-H specialists, event management and activities are a small part of their responsibilities.

County or parish agent/advisor/educator--these individuals typically work in one or several local jurisdictions providing program leadership, program management and development, and evaluation at a local level. These individuals typically have either a master's or bachelor's degree and are considered educators or faculty within Extension. Events and activities comprise an important part of their job, but these activities are not the exclusive focus.

Program associate, program assistant, coordinator, para-professional, program representative--these individuals typically work under the supervision of an agent/advisor/educator or specialist and their positions do not require a bachelor's degree (although some individuals may possess such a degree) AND these individuals are primarily responsible for conducting events and activities. In some state 4-H offices, these kinds of people are events and activities



Staffing, Structures and Salaries



Aide--these individuals typically work on a part-time basis with an Extension office and provide clerical or support services (like photocopying, organizing materials for a judging contest, organizing record books to be reviewed, etc.) for others. They do not teach programs, develop or deliver curriculum, although they may assist others at programs and events in a supporting role.

FTE--Full-time equivalent. A standard measure used to calculate staff size which allows several part-time positions to be combined together.

1862 Land-Grants. Land-Grant Institutions Established by the Passage of the First Morrill Act (1862): the Morrill Act was intended to provide a broad segment of the population with a practical education that had direct relevance to their daily lives.

1890 Land Grants. 1890 Land-Grant Colleges and Universities and Tuskegee University: historically black land-grant colleges and universities. Through the Act of August 30, 1890 (the Second Morrill Act), and several other authorities, these institutions may receive Federal funds for agricultural research, extension and teaching.

1994 Land Grants. 1994 Land-Grant Colleges & Universities [also referred to as Tribal Colleges]: Native American Institutions that received land-grant status in 1994 as a provision in the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act, titled "The Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994."



For more information about 4-H, visit:
<http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/>

