



PROGRAM EVALUATION METHODS

Educational Design and Delivery Domain

Positive youth development is an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for youth by providing opportunities that build on young peoples' strengths and fostering positive relationships with peers and caring adults¹. 4-H uses many different strategies to promote the healthy development of youth; but how do we know if positive youth development is really happening in our clubs and programs?

One way to be confident that your club is nurturing opportunities for positive youth development is to look for signs that positive youth development is taking place. In the business and education realms, this is known as *continuous improvement*.

Continuous improvement is using information (such as data, observation, or self-reflection) to improve efficiency and effectiveness of an educational program or initiative². 4-H has been doing continuous improvement from the very start, when the 4-H motto "make the best better" was adopted in 1920³.

Evaluating the 4-H program is a shared responsibility between 4-H professionals and volunteers, which demonstrates the 4-H motto to our members. Volunteers play an important role in assisting 4-H professionals by assisting them with administering and collecting evaluation data from participants and parents. Although the evaluation of the total 4-H program tends to be more formal, volunteers can use feedback, self-reflection, and quality standards to continuously improve the programs so that youth can have the optimum positive youth development experience.

Participant Feedback helps 4-H staff and volunteers close the gap between our current performance and desired performance⁴. Our desired performance is that 4-H experiences provide opportunities for youth to thrive while exploring their sparks in a safe environment, guided by a caring adult. Feedback should be relatively simple. You can solicit feedback from youth, parents, or even other volunteers. One simple way to get feedback from younger youth is to have them complete the Clover Feedback Form. Youth can write or draw a picture about what they learned, what they would like to learn, what they enjoy about 4-H (how it makes them feel), and what they would change if they could.

Facilitator Self-Reflection is like feedback, but instead of asking others to describe what is (and isn't) taking place, self-reflection can help 4-H professionals and volunteers reflect on what is working well and what can be improved. Some questions you might ask yourself include (adapted from Thiran⁵):

- Is my reason for being a 4-H leader the same now as it was when I started?
- Do I make myself accessible to my members, parents, and other volunteers?
- Do I seek input or feedback from my members and parents?
- If I were a current 4-H member in my group, how might I rate my efforts as the adult volunteer?
- Does my club/program offer a positive group climate? If not, why not?



4-H Quality Checklist is a simple tool to see if elements of positive youth development are taking place in your club or program. The checklist can help identify areas where your club is strong, as well as areas for improvement.

Taking time to check in with yourself, your members, and parents can provide opportunities to apply our motto “Make the Best Better.” Volunteers should set aside time at least annually to evaluate where their club or program is, and whether it is providing opportunities for youth to experience positive youth development. After spending some time thinking about continuous improvement for your club or program, discuss your findings with your local 4-H professional.

Club Quality Checklist – Use this checklist to identify areas where positive youth development is strong in your club, and areas where there are opportunities to “make the best better.” This checklist was developed based on the developmental context of the 4-H Thriving Model⁶.

Sparks

- Youth have opportunities to build subject matter expertise and skills about topics they care about.
- Youth are encouraged to set personal goals for learning.

- Youth are encouraged to share what they learned with others.

Belonging

- Volunteers welcome youth as they arrive.
- The physical environment is safe for all.
- Accommodations are made for youth with special needs.
- Volunteers recognize youth for their contributions.

Relationships

- Social time is encouraged for youth to build relationships.
- Volunteers give youth individual attention.
- Volunteers make youth feel known and valued.
- Volunteers take the ideas of youth seriously.

Engagement

- Activities are age appropriate.
- Youth are given the chance to reflect on how they can apply what they learned.
- Volunteers apply experiential learning to 4-H educational programs.
- Volunteers allow youth to make mistakes and learn from them.
- Activities integrate real-world experiences.



VOLUNTEER

Research Knowledge Competency

References

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- ³Pearson. (2016). *Providing educational feedback* [White paper]. Higher Education Services. <https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/us/en/pearson-ed/downloads/Feedback.pdf>
- ⁴National 4-H History Preservation Program. (2010). *4-H motto, creed and pledge*. <https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/History/M-C-P/>
- ⁵Thiran, R. (2018, September 23). 5 self-reflection questions leaders should ask themselves. *Leaderonomics.com*. <https://www.leaderonomics.com/articles/leadership/5-self-reflection-questions>
- ⁶Extension Foundation, Cooperative Extension, and U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2021). *4-H thriving model of PYD*. <https://helping-youth-thrive.extension.org/>

The original resource 4-H Educational Design and Delivery: Program Evaluation Methods (VRKC: Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy) was developed by Pam Larson Nippolt.

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Research Knowledge Competency

Clover Feedback Form

Think about each question and write or draw your answer. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Your input will help “make the best better” for our club!

What did you learn or share about your project this year?

What decisions were you able to make about the club?

What did you enjoy the most about your club?

What would you change about the club for next year?