

## Don't be afraid to ask; Idaho 4-H volunteer assessment

### AT A GLANCE

**A survey of Minidoka County 4-H Volunteers shows they are well trained, feel valued and are making a positive impact on the development of Idaho youth.**

### The Situation

The Idaho 4-H Volunteer Assessment was created in order to have a clearer understanding of adult 4-H volunteers in Idaho. Specifically, three topics were researched. Retention; what can be done to improve the volunteer retention rate. Rejuvenation; what can be done to help volunteers stay excited about the 4-H program. Recognition; what can be done to make volunteers feel genuinely appreciated.

### Our Response

In the fall of 2013, an online evaluation (Survey Monkey) was developed by UI Extension faculty, county staff and a task force of 4-H volunteers from Minidoka County. After final approval from the UI Institutional Review Board, the survey was introduced at the January 2014 Minidoka County 4-H leaders meeting. The online assessment was available on the county 4-H webpage and printed copies made available if requested.

The assessment included 34 questions and took 20-30 minutes to complete. Questions included several formats, including drop boxes, ranking, multiple choice, comment/essay, descriptive text and rating scale. Volunteers had from January 13 through February 14 to complete the survey with 49 out of 85 individuals responding. Those responding were all current Minidoka County 4-H volunteers over 18 years of age.



Adult volunteers report they are motivated by the opportunity to help youth learn new skills. Photo by Jeni Bywater.

Questions included on the assessment were:

- Basic demographic and ethnicity information
- Service years and types of volunteering
- Reasons for volunteering, motivation factors and reasons to continue or discontinue in 4-H
- Trainings available to volunteers
- Suggested training topics and delivery methods
- Activity in local, regional or state events
- Use of club officers and parliamentary procedure
- Support received from other volunteers and staff
- Type of recognition preferred
- Appreciation and value by 4-H professionals, volunteers, parents and youth

The purpose of the assessment pilot completed by Minidoka County was to develop an effective tool to measure the statewide condition of 4-H volunteer retention, rejuvenation and recognition. An added benefit was that the data collected will be used by Minidoka County to improve and strengthen their existing 4-H program.

### **Program Outcomes**

Some important information learned about the 4-H volunteer respondents from Minidoka County are: 77% female, 42% are ages 41-50, 77% live in rural areas, 29% have volunteered for 5-9 years and 80% have/had children in 4-H. This sampling truly represented the volunteer base in the county and added to the authenticity of the study.

Some answers to questions related to retention revealed that Minidoka volunteers are motivated to help youth learn new skills, they continue because of their own children's involvement, but would discontinue due to politics or time demands in their personal life, and their experience would be more meaningful with additional support from the 4-H staff.

Minidoka responses to rejuvenation questions showed that 53% attended four or more county leader's meetings per year, 53% have attended regional trainings and 68% are also mentored by other county 4-H volunteers. When asked about additional training, 66% would prefer face-to-face trainings. Personal development and leadership were the most requested subject matter topic for future volunteer training, followed by science and technology.

Eighty-two percent of Minidoka volunteers agree or strongly agree that they are appreciated and valued by the Extension office and 71% felt a personal thank you was the best form of recognition.

### **The Future**

The next step for Minidoka County 4-H is to apply filters to the responses based on age and years of service to better define the information received and apply it to the local program. Full assessment results will be shared with Minidoka 4-H volunteers in November. A volunteer task force from the county will be established and steps taken to plan additional trainings, review policy and/or other applications to incorporate what was learned from the volunteer survey.

Based on the Minidoka County pilot, the Idaho 4-H Volunteer Assessment tool is currently being evaluated. This will determine if the results have provided both the necessary and appropriate information to help strengthen and grow the 4-H program by retaining, motivating and recognizing volunteers. After this evaluation, adjustments will be made and the assessment will be conducted on a district-wide level in the fall of 2014. Results will be reviewed and plans continued for

the assessment to be conducted statewide during the 2014-2015 4-H year. This statewide evaluation will establish much needed baseline information for Idaho 4-H and individual counties. It is a great opportunity for Idaho 4-H volunteers to share their voice, be heard and feel appreciated.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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