

IMPACT

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Extension

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Regional educators – Forging the future for Idaho 4-H programming

AT A GLANCE

Idaho legislative funding enabled the University of Idaho Extension to hire four regional 4-H educators to enhance communication, continuity and build priority programs statewide.

The Situation

Limited resources for University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development caused a lack of consistency in statewide 4-H programming and limited support of 4-H professionals working on the county level. Most state level 4-H Youth Development faculty and staff were housed in Moscow, making statewide outreach difficult. In early 2015, a state 4-H specialist left, leaving the Idaho 4-H program with an even larger challenge of providing the needed education and direction for the large and diverse statewide 4-H program.

Our Response

The Idaho 4-H Youth Development program worked with the University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences associate dean and director of UI Extension to implement the Ideal Structure of Idaho 4-H Plan which had been recommended by a UI Extension planning committee. This 2012 plan outlined assigning a regional 4-H educator to each of the four geographic regions in Idaho to provide support with local programming. These educators would become part of the UI Extension 4-H Youth Development department. The plan also recommended assigning statewide responsibilities for a particular subject matter to each of the regional 4-H educators. The UI Extension director and state 4-H program leader were able to acquire state funding to implement the new structure for Idaho 4-H. As a result, four regional 4-H educators were hired to coordinate 4-H Youth Development



Teens participating in 4-H gain leadership skills and become confident, successful mentors for youth. Photo by Donna R. Gillespie.

programming across the state. The statewide assignments were divided among the four regional 4-H educators into 4-H subject matter areas; STEM animal science, positive youth development (PYD), STEM outdoor education including shooting sports and teen leadership and citizenship programming.

Program Outcomes

The four new regional 4-H educators met as a team to determine short term goals. Each educator was able to meet with the 4-H faculty and staff in each county in their respective regions. Forty-two counties received a visit from one of the regional 4-H educators within the first two months of hire. During these visits, the regional 4-H educators collected information regarding county needs for the Idaho 4-H Youth Development program. For some counties this was the first visit from the 4-H Youth Development department.

During the 2015 Statewide 4-H Youth Development Training, Regional 4-H educators reported back to county 4-H professionals what they had learned. County 4-H professionals then developed lists and prioritized statewide needs in six general categories (professional development, PYD, shooting sports, animal science, leadership and citizenship and volunteer management), providing more direction for the new regional 4-H educators.

For animal science, lesson plans have been drafted, and twenty-five are in place for use starting Oct. 1, 2016. These provide county staff with resources to help volunteers teach educational information to Idaho 4-H youth.

Responsibility for 4-H horse programs shifted to the regional 4-H educators in Dec. 2015. Since that time, the Idaho 4-H Youth Horse Council bylaws underwent major revisions, and a significant overhaul of all State Horse Contest rules transpired to enhance program consistency statewide.

To support professional development for county-based 4-H professionals, 18 modules were identified and the majority are developed to provide an onboarding orientation structure for new 4-H professionals.

In addition to personal visits to all the counties, 4-H trainings were also held in four different locations across Idaho in March of 2016. Regional 4-H educators traveled with other 4-H educators and specialists to bring updated information and training such as teen programming, volunteer management, new curriculum and other topics requested by the county 4-H professionals who attended.

In the PYD area, the need for education for both professional staff and volunteers of what PYD is and how we implement the concepts was identified. PYD concepts are woven in the orientation modules as well as specific workshops delivered to 4-H professional staff, volunteers and camp counselors.

Shooting sports efforts included verification of 900+ current or past volunteers for liability purposes. A State 4-H Shooting Sports Plan and set of statewide rules were developed. There was a 66 percent increase in Level 1 instructor training held statewide. A state 4-H Shooting Sports website is under construction.

In 2015 a group of 4-H professionals, volunteers and youth came together to consider the state of 4-H teen programming in Idaho and to develop a shared vision. The research conducted and resources prepared by the 4-H Teen Task Force is enabling planning committees to develop content rich, engaging and educational programs, in partnership with teens. This structure will benefit all Idaho youth. In 2016, the 4-H Know Your Government Conference, the Idaho 4-H Teen Conference and the Idaho 4-H Ambassador Conference came under new leadership by Steering Committees.

The Future

University of Idaho 4-H Youth Development regional 4-H educators will continue to work closely with county 4-H professionals, UI Extension educators and other 4-H stakeholders to assess and meet their educational needs, develop training and provide leadership for 4-H programs across Idaho.

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