



## **Creating Successful Youth - Adult Partnerships**

Young people can provide a valuable perspective in the decision making and program planning for a 4-H club, program or advisory group. Youth are more likely to promote and participate in programs in which they take an active role in planning and implementing. In addition, they are able to share the viewpoints of their peers, which will ensure that the programs and activities planned will be of interest to other youth. The idea is for youth to be active partners with adults in all phases of the group's activities. The shift to this model may be gradual, and to accomplish this change, it is important that all adults in the group understand the roles of the youth are able to shift from the traditional view of youth as *objects* to youth as *partners*.

### **Youth as Objects**

Youth are seen solely as the objects of the group's efforts. No effort is made to involve them in program decision making and planning. They are only involved as participants of the program.

*Example: Club plans a community service program and invites youth to attend.*

### **Youth as Recipients**

Youth are asked for their opinions or asked to use their skills in helping roles.

*Example: Club plans a community event and adult leaders ask youth to help with activities planned.*

### **Youth as Partners**

Youth are given the opportunity to work directly with adults in the planning and implementing of events and programs.

*Example: Youth and adult members of a group work together to plan and implement a community activity; ideas from all members of the group are equally valued and considered.*

The focus of youth and adult partnerships should be to acknowledge and appreciate the abilities of 4-H youth and to include them in the planning, conducting and evaluating of events and projects. Adults in 4-H need to work cooperatively with youth to create a trusting atmosphere and a positive, collective vision which in turn helps to promote successful partnerships.

Understanding and promoting the importance of having young people included in the decision making process encourages young people to continue to make significant contributions. 4-H provides opportunities for youth and adults to acquire the skills and resources needed to make activities inclusive and effective. Having youth involved in both the planning and implementation of a program can produce positive results for the youth that participate in the program and the overall program in general. Involving youth in leadership roles traditionally reserved only for adults can result in the following benefits:



- More effective outreach to younger audiences; youth leaders are aware of the needs and interests of youth who will benefit from the program since youth are able to relate to others close to their age.
- Youth are not caught up in “the way things always have been done” and have a new outlook on ideas for club and county programs and activities.
- Adult leaders gain valuable human resources due to the sharing of responsibilities between youth and adults.
- Youth become invested in the club and overall 4-H program and encourage other youth to develop a vested interest as well.
- Youth more easily accept decisions due to the fact that they are involved in the decision making process.

Listed below are tips and tricks for adult volunteers to develop strong and effective youth-adult partnerships in their clubs, county programs and advisory councils:

- Actively seek youth input, and be sure to listen to their ideas and ask questions.
- Ensure that each adult and young person enters a partnership with a clear understanding of everyone’s roles and responsibilities.
- Value youth participation and what they bring to the program (new ideas, enthusiasm and a real connection to those youth that are being reached through the program). Encourage youth to value the adults’ participation and what they bring - knowledge, experience, and access to resources.
- Schedule meetings when and where young people can attend, and keep to the scheduled time. Do not expect more from youth than you would from another adult.
- Match youth with groups that are appropriate for their skills and interests.
- Work with young people to find meaningful roles and responsibilities for all involved. This will result in youth becoming invested in the success of their 4-H programs.
- Prepare both youth and adults for involvement by sharing information prior to meetings/activities. Make sure that information on all programs is equally shared with both youth and adults.
- Set realistic expectations. Effective partnerships don’t set young people up for failure by throwing them into situations for which they are not prepared.
- Offer youth and adult training so they can work together and be accepting of one another.
- Develop an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. If needed, create and utilize a set of ground rules for discussion to ensure equal opportunity for expression of thoughts.
- Be a good role model – set a good example through language and actions, and set the same standards for youth.
- Listen and validate the thinking of youth members, and let them know their ideas are welcome.
- Be willing to try youth members’ ideas even if those particular ideas did not work in your previous experience.



- Get the highest levels of the 4-H organization to commit fully to youth partnership in the 4-H program.
- Evaluate the programs, and be willing to change and adapt where necessary.

*Written by Laura Bovitz.*

## References

"Engaging Youth in 4-H Advisory Groups," Rita Natale Saathoff, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Publication 4H256, February 2004. [www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication](http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication)

"Youth-Adult Partnerships," University of Florida Extension. <http://florida4h.org/volunteers>

Creating Youth Adult Partnerships, National 4-H Council. [www.4-Hmall.org](http://www.4-Hmall.org)



## *Did You Know...*



2002 was the 4-H Centennial Celebration. A National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was held in Washington, DC with over 1200 youth and adults from 600 organizations mapping out strategies for the next century of excellence in positive youth development.

*For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit [www.nj4h.rutgers.edu](http://www.nj4h.rutgers.edu).*

Cooperating Agencies: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and County Boards of Chosen Freeholders. Rutgers Cooperative Extension, a unit of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, is an equal opportunity program provider and employer.