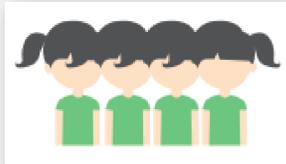




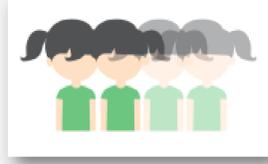
Understanding First-Year Experiences in 4-H

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Only 50% of youth return to 4-H after their **FIRST YEAR.**



How do 4-Hers and their adults perceive their first-year in 4-H?

STUDY OVERVIEW

Qualtrics Online Survey

- Youth who had just completed their first year in 4-H
- Adults (parents or guardians) who had a youth who just completed their first year in 4-H
- Questions were quantitative and qualitative
- Total responses for 2017: Youth (751), Adults (931)
- States involved: California, Idaho, New Jersey, Wyoming

Youth Perspective: What was their experience?

- 90% felt the adult who worked with them were caring
- 87% felt they learned new things
- 84% found their projects interesting

Youth Perspective: Why they might not come back

- 19% Didn't feel connected to other youth
- 15% Don't have time
- 12% Didn't know when club or project met

Youth joined 4-H:

- To try new things (58%)
- To have fun (48%)
- To build skills (37%)

- Meeting new people
- Learning experience
- Showing or competition

Adult Perspective: What was the best part for your child?

- 16% Nothing
- 15% Communication Issues
- 13% Lack of organization

Adult Perspective: What would you change?

Re-enroll

3.99x greater odds

Youth: More positive experiences

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Abstract

Out-of-school time programs, like 4-H, have been shown to have a positive impact on youth, but behavior change in Extension programs is most likely to occur if offered with more frequency and duration over time. In-depth information is needed for a program to address the factors that are most important for keeping youth engaged in a program.

The research focuses on first-year 4-H member experiences in California, Idaho, Montana, and New Jersey from the perspective of youths and adults (parents/guardians). Participants were asked why they enrolled themselves (or their child) in 4-H, their overall experience, what they liked best, and what they would change. Though results showed an overall positive experience, participants provided rich data on improvements that could be made in the local 4-H programs.

Purpose

This research study is focused on understanding why youth and families join, drop out, or stay in 4-H. By learning about these factors, youth recruitment and retention in 4-H can be improved.

By conducting the research across multiple states, the findings are more generalizable and thereby develop steps to implement strategies across states to both engage and retain more youth in 4-H programming. As a result, more youth will receive the short- and long-term benefits of 4-H, including the tools (knowledge, attitudes and skills) they need to become competent, caring, and contributing citizens of the world, as well as thriving and successful adults.

Objectives

The ultimate goal of this research study is to retain more youth in the 4-H community club program nationwide, as well as to recruit more youth to the program annually. This will be achieved through understanding how youth and their families experience the program in both negative and positive ways.

To understand those experiences, and in turn take actionable steps to recruit and retain youth is an important phase of this research study. Specific objectives include:

- To better understand the experiences first year 4-H members from the member perspective and parent/guardian perspective.
- To determine if their first-year 4-H experience impacts their intent to continue their involvement.

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A team of Cooperative Extension/ 4-H staff from California, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and New Jersey have formed a research team to examine 4-H member retention in these five states.

	2015 Survey	2016 Survey	2017 Survey
California	X	X	X
Idaho	X	X	X
Montana		X	
New Jersey		X	X
Wyoming			X

2017 Participants and Procedures

- Data were collected using an online Qualtrics survey.
- Emails were sent to first-year 4-H families in California, Idaho, New Jersey, and Wyoming.
- Three follow-up emails were sent as reminders asking youth and adults to complete a survey about their experience during their first year in 4-H.
- Institutional Review Boards at University of California, Davis; University of Idaho; University of Wyoming; and Rutgers University approved the study with online consent, and responses were anonymous.
- The survey was initially pilot-tested with a subset of counties in California and all counties in Idaho in Summer 2015.
- See chart for state participation.

Survey Questions

- Why joined 4-H
- How they heard about 4-H
- Intent to re-enroll
- Family history in 4-H
- Expectations (adult only; open ended)
- Best part of 4-H (open ended)
- Changes they'd make (open ended)
- General experience (scale)
- Reasons may not return (youth only)

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2017 Response by State

State	Adults	Youth
California	534	418
Idaho	111	92
Wyoming	165	114
New Jersey	121	127
Total	931	751



RESEARCH FINDINGS - Youth Responses



Youth Experiences in 4-H

The survey, containing both qualitative and quantitative questions, provides useful information about the program and aids understanding of the challenges new members and families may face.

The 10-item experience scale provides an overall indicator of experience in 4-H, and showed us that adults who perceive the first-year more positively were more likely to re-enroll (Miller et al., 2017).

Data from this survey can be used to inform procedures and activities to help improve youth programs and increase member retention.

Why did you join 4-H?

Reason	Overall (%)	California (%)	Idaho (%)	Montana (%)	New Jersey (%)
Had a friend in 4-H	26.9	29.0	25.6	25.6	21.3
To try new things	53.7	57.5	50.4	50.4	45.6
To make friends	27.3	29.0	27.2	24.8	23.1
To show at fair	21.7	24.7	24.8	17.6	11.8
To serve community	24.1	27.1	15.2	21.6	21.9
To have fun	42.5	45.1	40.8	43.2	34.3
Personal Growth	30.8	33.6	29.6	27.2	24.9
Skill Building	36.2	37.8	37.6	38.4	27.8
Family or Personal Influences	24.6	24.9	26.4	35.2	14.2
Other	3.8	3.9	2.4	4.8	3.6

What was the best part of 4-H?

"Helping people and hanging out with my new friends" - Youth, California

"Learning and growing as a person" - Youth, New Jersey

"All the opportunities 4-H provided me with" - Youth, Idaho

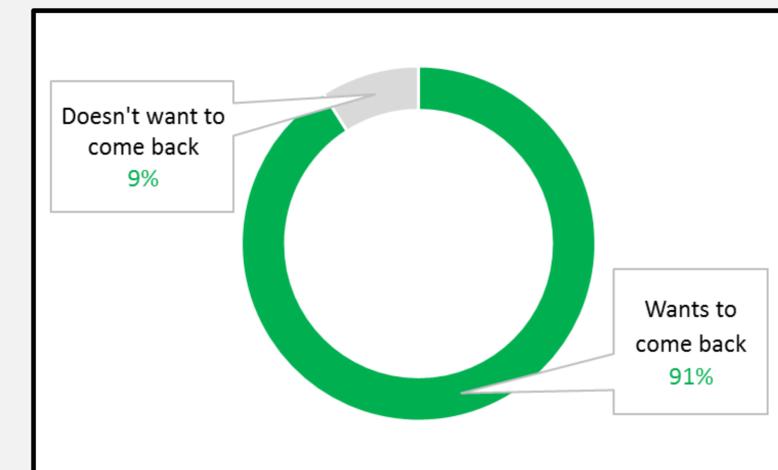
"Learning how to better serve my community" - Youth, Wyoming

Overall, youth said that they had a positive experience in 4-H!

Average score for positive experience was 4.20 (out of 5)



Over 90% of youth plan to come back to 4-H!



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RESEARCH FINDINGS - Adult Responses

What was the best part of 4-H for your child?



Meeting New People



Learning Experiences



Showing or Competition

Why did you enroll your child in 4-H?

- 53%: try new things
- 40%: have fun
- 34%: show at fair

How did you hear about 4-H?

- 35%: from another parent
- 19%: family history
- 16%: a friend of my child's

What were some challenges you had?

- Difficulty Navigating Resources
- Communication

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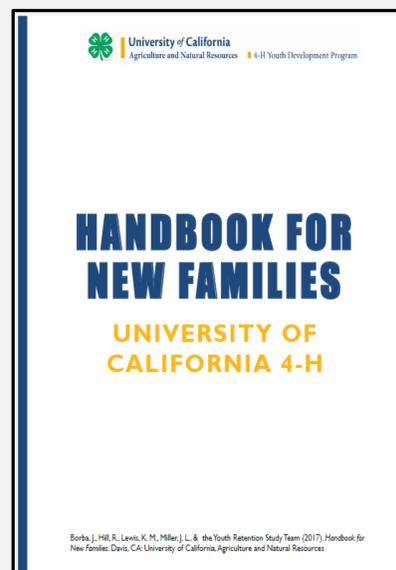
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- Results showed varying experiences of adults and children in the 4-H program from parents' perspective.
- Results indicate families join 4-H primarily to try new things, have fun, to show at fair and many families said the best part of 4-H is the friends they made. The majority of families had a positive experience in the program, but even with those positive results, they still had suggestions for improvement; specifically, families felt that organization and communication could be improved in addition to program leadership.
- From the qualitative data, parents' expressed dissatisfaction with the program due to unclear communication from and about the program.
- From the findings, future directions for applied research involve investigating differences in rural versus urban youth, differences in types of projects youth are enrolled in, and examining the culture of 4-H volunteers in terms of how they view success and welcome new youth. Once this is determined, we will collaborate with 4-H staff, 4-H volunteers and 4-H youth to strengthen their capacity to welcome new youth and families into the program by incorporating lesson learned from these studies. We will provide technical assistance in the adoption of these practices.
- Continued examination of why youth join, stay, or leave a program is essential to its success. Surveys like this can help answer essential questions about a program so that improvements can be made.

Products Developed

From the qualitative data, parents' expressed dissatisfaction with the program due to unclear communication from and about the program. These findings informed the research team to develop multiple strategies to increase new 4-H member and family retention in the program. For example, the research team developed a pilot version of a 4-H Family Handbook and a Checklist for Project Leaders on how to welcome new families.

New Family Handbook



Project Leaders Checklist

#	X	Item
1		Have you met your Club Leader(s) and discussed your plan for implementing your project(s)?
2		Have you completed all the steps for becoming a 4-H adult volunteer? (1. Filled out the application and paid fees; 2. Fingerprinted (if a new 4-H adult volunteer); 3. Completed county orientation)
3		Do you have a list of the youth who are going to participate in your project(s) and are they enrolled in the 4-H project(s) you are going to lead? (Your Club Leader or Volunteer Enrollment Coordinator can check this for you)
4		Have you developed a project description and lesson plan for what will be covered on which dates and if there will be any cost for participants?
5		Do you have a UC ANR user agreement with the facility you will be utilizing? (Your county staff member must assist you in obtaining this document)
6		Do you have completed and signed youth and adult treatment authorization/health history form on hand for all participants? Youth: http://4h.ucanr.edu/files/4236.pdf Adult: http://4h.ucanr.edu/files/20100.pdf
7		Have you provided the dates, times, and location of your project meetings to the youth enrolled in your project?
8		Is there at least one additional adult that will be on site with you at each meeting?
9		If you are going to fundraise or secure grant support for your program, have you received approval from your county 4-H staff and County Director?
10		Is there ample drinking water available?
11		Have you reviewed the "4-H Project Leaders Digest" available online at: http://4h.ucanr.edu/files/4462.pdf
12		Do you have "Annual Project Report" forms on hand for the 4-H members to keep track of their project participation? http://4h.ucanr.edu/files/220272.doc

Lessons Learned Regarding Survey Distribution

- 4-H teens in California and New Jersey reviewed the survey and provided suggestions to make the survey more accessible to youth and to get at barriers not previously identified by the team (e.g. "I didn't feel connected to other youth in the club"; "Parents in 4-H don't get along"; "I didn't know when my club or project met").
- The Qualtrics "Contacts" feature was used to send out the initial email with the survey and two follow-up reminders; this helped track the survey distribution.
- Provided paper surveys for families without internet access or missing email addresses.
- Response rates were fairly low in all states. Advertise the survey often and broadly (e.g., newsletters, meetings, events) to increase participation in the future. Point out how the data will help the program and, if possible, provide previous findings.

New state joining study in 2018...
LOUISIANA

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