

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 will help to develop and 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 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 of 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.

METHODS

- Data were collected using a Qualtrics online survey.
- Emails were sent to first-year 4-H families (youth and adult parents/guardians) in the participating states.
- 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 and the other institutions involved in the study 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.

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.

This research focuses on first-year 4-H member experiences in the participating states 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.

STUDY OVERVIEW

- The study uses a descriptive correlational research design.
- Questions were both quantitative and qualitative.
- The study was started in 2015. See *State Participation and Response Rates* chart for information on states involved.



ADULT PERCEPTIONS

Percentages are a cumulative average of the past four years (2014-2018)



Why did you enroll your child in 4-H?

- **60%: try new things**
- **45%: have fun**
- **40%: personal growth**
- **38%: develop skills**

How did you hear about 4-H?

- **23%: a friend of my child's**
- **23%: family history**
- **12%: at school**

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

- **29%: learning opportunities**
- **20%: animals**
- **12%: events, activities, projects**

What would you change? *

- **16% communication issues**
- **15% other program components (policy, culture, activities, etc.)**
- **14% nothing/positive experience**

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Why child joined 4-H?
- How they heard about 4-H?
- Intent to re-enroll
- Family history in 4-H
- Expectations (*open ended. Adult only*)
- Best part of 4-H (*open ended*)
- Changes they'd make (*open ended*)
- General experience (*scale*)
- Reason they may not return (*Youth only*)

STATE PARTICIPATION & RESPONSES RATES

Seven states have collected data in the past four years. New states joining study in 2019 are New Mexico, Missouri, and Washington.

State	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	Cumulative
California (CA)	126 (49%)	498 (59%)	534 (57%)	317(26%)	1,475 (45%)
Idaho (ID)	131 (51%)	117 (14%)	111 (12%)	136(11%)	495 (15%)
Montana (MT)	--	98 (11%)	--	--	98 (3%)
New Jersey (NJ)	--	148 (16%)	121 (13%)	56 (5%)	310 (10%)
Wyoming (WY)	--	--	165 (18%)	155 (13%)	320 (10%)
Florida (FL)	--	--	--	293 (24%)	293 (9%)
Louisiana (LA)	--	--	--	258 (21%)	258 (8%)
Total	257	846	931	1,215	3,249

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- From the qualitative data, adults expressed dissatisfaction with the program due to unclear communication from and about the program.
- Survey showed varying experiences of adults and youth in the 4-H program from parents' perspective.
- Survey indicates families join 4-H primarily to try new things, have fun, for personal growth, and to develop skills. Many families said the best part of 4-H are the learning opportunities and 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.
- The qualitative data showed that parents expressed dissatisfaction with the program due to unclear communication from and about the program.



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* Data for this question is for 2014-2017.