Planning and Conducting a Successful Program or Activity

Plan!

There is a popular saying that states “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” This is true with 4-H programs, events, and activities. If you don’t think ahead, they will fail miserably. The secret of a successful program lies in three words: plan, conduct, and evaluate. Here is an overview of a systematic process that will enable you to plan any type of function with ease and success.

1. **Determine what type of program you want to plan.**

   Consider the answers to these questions before you get started:
   - Is it long term or short term?
   - Who is the intended audience: youth or adults or both? (Be sure to involve them in the process.)
   - Why are you planning this program?
   - How was it determined that this program would be held?
   - Is this program new or existing? If it is existing, what is its past history and success? Refer to *Learn by Doing the 4-H Way* for tips on using the do-reflect-apply experiential process.

2. **Set goals for the program.**

   - What are you trying to accomplish?
   - What will a person in the program learn or gain from participating?
   - Write down this information: use it in planning, promoting, and evaluating.
   - Make your objectives specific, measurable, and appropriate for the intended participants.
   - Consider how you will evaluate the program so you will know what participants learned from it.

3. **Divide the task at hand into sub-tasks based on the set objectives.**

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- How many people will be needed to do the work?
- How much money will be needed?
- What permission will be needed?
- Will facility, transportation, lodging, or food arrangements be needed?
- Set realistic timelines. Build in flexibility but keep to deadlines.

4. **Create a planning team.**

- Involve people who will be participating or affected by the program.
- Identify and involve the appropriate people and assign tasks that match program needs and people’s interests.
- Delegate authority along with responsibility. Set expectations of outcomes and then let people perform tasks with their own styles.
- Monitor progress and provide guidance and assistance as needed.

5. **Determine what funds, supplies, and attendance will be needed.**

- Determine a budget. Do you have the funds needed? If not, will admission/fees need to be charged?
- Is there a minimum or maximum number of participants? Will they be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis? How many participants will it take to break even financially?
- If you don’t have the proper equipment, can you buy, borrow, or rent it?
- Is advance registration needed? Set registration deadlines.
- If program involves travel, overnight stays, or potentially hazardous activities, [4-H Event Permission Forms](#) must be used.

6. **Promote the program**

- Use a variety of promotion methods that will be suitable for your intended audience.
- Send news releases to mass media, such as newspapers and radio. Refer to *How to Write a News Release* for ideas.
7. **Get things done on time**

- Set a schedule and stick to it. Start on time. End on time.
- Plan for more than you need: have an alternative, “emergency” plan in case something goes awry.
- Keep even “serious” programs fun!

8. **Promise what people want and deliver what you’ve promised.**

- Be organized and professional and act it.
- Make participants feel welcome. Greet them. Say hello and goodbye.
- Give people more than they expect.

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**Evaluate!**

9. **Evaluate the planning and conducting processes as well as the end results.**

- Observe the program *while* it is happening. Listen to comments from participants. Make needed adjustments as the program is happening.
- How effective was the promotion of your program? How did people find out about it?
- Have the planning team evaluate how the planning process went. Was it efficient? How could it be improved?
- Follow-up with thank-you letters, notes, or gifts to people who helped make the program a success.
- Are all bills paid? Did you meet your budget?

10. **Determine how well program objectives were met.**

- The objectives are your destination. The program planned is your road map. Evaluation helps you determine how good your vacation spot was *and* how enjoyable was the drive to get there.
- Ask participants questions based directly on the objectives of the program, such as:
  - Did we meet our goals?
  - How successful was our event?
  - What could we do to improve it next time?
- Use a variety of evaluation methods that are appropriate for the program participants. Some ideas for evaluation methods include:
  - Written questionnaires
  - Face-to-face or telephone interviews
  - Suggestion boxes
  - Group discussion
  - Indicators of interest in program, based on number of participants or income generated
  - Casual observation
  - Knowledge or skills gained by participants based on before-after comparisons or testimonials of participants.
  - Comparisons with past, similar, or competing programs.
  - Would participants recommend program to others or attend next time?
- Is program worth repeating?
- Share the results of your evaluation with people who will want to know: planning committee members, sponsors, county 4-H staff, participants, etc.