Volunteers Working with 4-H Staff

The Roles of Volunteers

In every county, the 4-H Youth Development Program is planned and conducted by paid 4-H staff. Ideally, the paid 4-H staff and volunteers work together as a team in carrying out the 4-H mission and in conducting the 4-H program.

4-H volunteers are part of a large network of individuals working with 4-H youth throughout the United States. 4-H volunteers are caring adults and teens who serve as positive role models for the youth they work with in our local community 4-H programs.

There are many roles for volunteers, which are described in *Selecting the 4-H Volunteer Role Right for You*. Volunteers who work directly with youth are screened and trained to ensure that they will serve our youth in the best manner possible.

Whatever the role you may select as a volunteer, you will interact often with paid county 4-H staff. You may also have the opportunity to work with state 4-H staff. It is important that you understand the role of paid staff in helping you to do your job as a volunteer.

The county 4-H staff is responsible for working directly with volunteers. This includes recruitment, screening, appointing, training, evaluation and supervision of teen and adult volunteers involved in the program. The staff also provides guidance to county 4-H leaders’ associations, teen councils, expansion and review committees, county 4-H foundations and other advisory groups.

Another responsibility is to plan, conduct and evaluate educational programs in cooperation with volunteers. This may include activities and events such as public presentations, fairs, camps, recognition events, animal shows and others. It may also include
school enrichment and after school programs, special interest programs, and programs run in cooperation with other organizations.

The county 4-H staff also promotes the 4-H program through mass media, cooperating with other agencies and organizations, and holding special promotional events. In addition, the staff makes and maintains contacts within the community for educational and financial resources that support 4-H members, clubs, leaders and programs.

There are generally five types of paid staff at the county level, including county 4-H agent, 4-H program associate, 4-H program assistant, clerical staff and consultants. Each county is usually assigned a county 4-H agent; the rest of the staffing depends upon specific county situations and funding opportunities.

The county 4-H agent is administratively responsible for the total county 4-H program. This means the agent is responsible for overall program planning, reporting, staff training, and the general state of the 4-H program. In addition, the agent has specific program responsibilities.

Every county 4-H agent is also a Rutgers University faculty member, and in addition to county responsibilities, is assigned university-related duties. These may include research, committees, faculty meetings and more. By fulfilling these duties, the agent strengthens the link between county and university, and ensures that 4-H members and leaders receive the most current information and opportunities available.

The 4-H agent reports to the 4-H department chair at the state 4-H office. To become a county 4-H agent, an individual must have a master’s degree and three years of experience. Funding for the position is generally provided by both the university and the county.

The 4-H program associate is responsible for specific 4-H program areas. This varies from county to county depending on need and situation. As a Rutgers University staff member, each program associate also serves as a link between county and university by participation on committees, at 4-H department meetings, and at state 4-H events.
Each program associate is supervised by the county 4-H agent in his/her own county, and is required to have a bachelor’s degree. In most cases, funding is provided by both the university and the county.

4-H program assistants and consultants provide assistance to the county 4-H agent or program associate in specific program areas based on county needs. Funding and qualifications for these positions are generally determined by the counties or special grant programs. These individuals are supervised by the county 4-H agent.

Clerical workers are provided by the counties. The county 4-H secretary is an important link between the 4-H program and the outside world, as well as 4-H members and leaders. In addition to providing clerical support, the secretary can also answer many questions and serve as an excellent resource.

State 4-H staff includes the 4-H department chair, regional 4-H agents, camp directors, program associates and other support staff. The role of the state 4-H staff is to provide support to the county programs and state 4-H events.

The 4-H department chair is the head of the Department of 4-H Youth Development at Rutgers University. This individual provides administrative leadership and program direction to the total New Jersey 4-H Program and reports to the state Director of Extension. Additional support and assistance is provided by Rutgers Cooperative Extension specialists and administrative staff as needed.