



# Getting Volunteers Involved in 4-H

## LEADER LETTER

Recruiting, maintaining, and motivating volunteers are important tasks for Alabama Cooperative Extension staff and volunteer leaders. These tasks must be well planned and thoughtfully managed.

- **Provide a Reason to Participate.**

People must identify a reason for becoming involved. They, not you, must recognize that reason. People will participate in 4-H only to the extent that their personal needs and interests are appealed to and met.

- **Give Recognition.**

To be appreciated and to feel important and needed are prime motivators in all of us. Encouragement and recognition are essential for active involvement in 4-H.

- **Clearly Define and Communicate Your Goals.**

You motivate people by selling ideas, programs, and results—not memberships. A group with a set of goals that are clearly understood and mutually accepted by its members has a force that is almost irresistible. Many groups, however, lack a clear sense of direction, and, as a result, they wander in their efforts with limited accomplishment.

- **Conduct Clearly Focused, Stimulating Meetings.**

Nothing is more discouraging than a poorly organized, rambling, unproductive meeting. Productive meetings require more than a powerful leader and parliamentary procedure.

- **Value Others Through Communication.**

Communication motivates people. The way we express ourselves can either *turn people on or turn them off*. It can gain their support or discourage their participation.

- **Listen.**

Young people and adults all want to be heard. People are motivated to achieve when they feel their ideas and suggestions are listened to and respected. The biggest cause of group apathy is the failure of leaders to really listen.

- **Look at Yourself.**

The ability to understand others begins with an understanding of oneself. Ask yourself three questions: *How did I get to be the person that I am? What motivates me to do the things I do? Why do I react in different ways to different people, situations, and things?* Honest answers to these three questions can give you tremendous insight into what motivates others.

- **Handle Conflict Creatively.**

Disagreement and conflict can be very destructive forces if not dealt with constructively. Open free-for-alls can split a 4-H group. Likewise, the suppressing of disagreement discourages new ideas and, in turn, the vitality needed by the group.

- **Reduce Hazards of Participation.**

Group participation can involve various hazards—being imposed upon by others, feeling insecure, being criticized, taking responsibility for decisions made, etc. Leaders who actively encourage good communications can reduce these risks.

### What Motivates Volunteers?

- An opportunity to help their families
- An opportunity to learn new skills
- An opportunity to help the community
- An opportunity to meet and get to know people in the community
- An opportunity to develop leadership skills
- An opportunity for community recognition
- An opportunity to use personal skills and knowledge
- An opportunity to learn more about community efforts and activities

**Key Points:** Research tells us that volunteers want to feel that their service is helping the community. Different people may be motivated by different conditions. To be successful in recruiting and maintaining volunteers, always be sensitive to your volunteers' needs.

## Exercise: What Motivates Volunteers?

### Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to assist participants in understanding what motivates volunteers. This is a beneficial exercise for a youth development committee or volunteer recruitment committee.

### Directions

Ask participants to rank the eight motivators for why they are involved in 4-H or other community activities, with number 1 being the strongest motivator and number 8 the weakest motivator.

- \_\_\_\_\_ An opportunity to help their families
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ An opportunity to meet and get to know people in the community
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ An opportunity to learn more about the community efforts and activities
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ An opportunity for community recognition
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ An opportunity to use personal skills and knowledge
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ An opportunity to develop leadership skills
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ An opportunity to help the community
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ An opportunity to learn new skills

Next, ask participants to rank the eight motivators in the order in which they believe volunteers would respond, with number 1 being the strongest motivator and number 8 the weakest motivator.

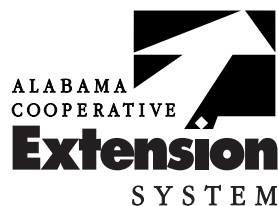
## Points for Discussion With Volunteers

- How do you perceive that your involvement can help your family? Your community?
- "An opportunity to help the community" is often one of the strongest personal motivators for involvement. How would you recruit volunteers who are concerned about your community? What would you tell them are the rewards of volunteering for 4-H?
- What could you do for volunteers to provide a more satisfying (motivating) environment?
- What new skills can be gained through involvement in 4-H? What aspects of personal growth can be achieved?

It can be difficult to determine other people's motivations. List what might motivate the following groups to become 4-H volunteers?

- Older teens \_\_\_\_\_
- Educators \_\_\_\_\_
- Parents \_\_\_\_\_
- Retirees \_\_\_\_\_
- Business leaders \_\_\_\_\_
- Religious educators \_\_\_\_\_
- Law enforcement personnel \_\_\_\_\_
- Foresters, wildlife personnel \_\_\_\_\_
- Hobbyists (model airplane building, quilting, canoeing) \_\_\_\_\_
- Professionals (computing, finance, agriculture, photography) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other groups \_\_\_\_\_

How can you use these motivating factors to recruit them to participate in 4-H?



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**For more information**, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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