



Evidence-Informed Best Practices among Walmart Foundation-funded 4-H Healthy Habits Programs

Prepared by: Madeleine deBlois, Kara Tanoue, DeeDee Avery, and Michele Walsh

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Introduction

Grant Program and Research Overview

Youth of color are broadly underrepresented in many widespread youth programs, and there is a growing need for programs to take into account the cultural context of the youth they serve and to be culturally-responsive to an increasingly diverse youth population.

In response to this need, beginning in 2009, National 4-H Council (Council) with support from the Walmart Foundation, has offered sub-grants to 4-H programs at land-grant universities (LGUs) to support increasing participation in 4-H Healthy Habits programs among underserved youth, namely Native American, Hispanic or Latino, and African American youth and their families. The 4-H Healthy Habits program consists of two youth engagement components.

- The first component, referred to here as the 4-H Healthy Habits Youth (4HHHY) programming, aims to reach large numbers of youth in grades 2 through 12 through a minimum of six hours of programming around nutrition and physical activity.
- The second component, 4-H Healthy Living Ambassador (4HHLA) program, focuses on positive youth development (PYD) of older youth through activities focused around 4-H Healthy Living, including health, nutrition and fitness, social and emotional well-being, and leadership skills.

The research was conducted by the University of Arizona and presents the insights and experiences of staff and participants in 4-H Healthy Habits programs that have received funding through National 4-H Council and the Walmart Foundation. Results from a six-month mixed-method evaluation study was commissioned by Council examining outcomes of the 4-H Healthy Habits program, populations served by 4-H Healthy Habits programs, approaches to both 4HHHY and 4HHLA programming, challenges encountered in recruitment and program delivery, and strategies for overcoming those challenges. Promising practices that LGUs are using to build robust, inclusive 4-H Healthy Habits programs educate youth and communities about nutrition and physical activity, and foster PYD for teens, especially teens of color.

GOALS OF THE 4-H HEALTHY HABITS PROGRAM

The objectives of the overall 4-H Healthy Habits program include:

- Improve dietary choices and increase physical fitness.
- Improve attitude toward and understanding of healthy foods.
- Increase family participation in eating at least one meal together daily.
- Improve knowledge of local resources available to underserved youth and their families that support and provide further information on 4-H Healthy Habits.

Additionally, through the 4HHLA component, engaged teens will:

- Increase leadership and work force readiness skill development.
- Explore interest in possible related careers.
- Increase personal knowledge and behavior changes as a result of training and program delivery.
- Serve as mentors and role models to peers, family members, and younger youth in nutrition and physical activity.

4-H Healthy Habits is increasing its reach, including to youth of color

Since 2012, with the inclusion of 1890 LGUs (historically black colleges and universities) in the program, specific outreach efforts have aimed to increase the participation of African American, Latinx, and Native American youth. A critical component of the 4-H Healthy Habits Program has been the completion of evaluation surveys by both 4HHHY and 4HHLA to assess what has been learned from their participation. In 2013, Walmart was the first 4-H Healthy Living donor to embrace the rollout of a national 4-H evaluation system called Common Measures. Youth must have completed at least six hours of programming to take the Common Measures surveys, aligning with the 4-H Healthy Habits required six-hour programming minimum. A section of Common Measures focuses on demographic data such as race, ethnicity, and residence. Common Measures data from the past three years highlight growth among these populations. In the 2016-2017 program year, more than 10,000 Latinx youth, 8,000 African American youth, and nearly 2,500 Native American youth participated in Common Measures surveys. From the 2014-2015 program year to the 2016-2017 program year, the number of Native American youth participants more than tripled, the number of multi-racial participants nearly tripled, and the number of African American and Latinx youth doubled.

4-H Healthy Habits youth participants report healthy behaviors around nutrition and physical activity

The majority of both teen leaders and youth participants reported that participating in 4-H Healthy Habits programs helped them learn about healthy eating and increase their healthy eating habits. Over 90 percent of youth participants and leaders agreed or strongly agreed that they learned why eating a healthy diet was important, how to make healthy food choices, and that they drink more water. The majority of youth also reported engaging in health behaviors such as participating in regular physical activity and eating more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, and less junk food. When broken down by race/ethnicity, there were only small differences between participants of different races or ethnicities. This suggests that 4-H Healthy Habits youth participants, regardless of their race or ethnicity, are benefiting from the program in similar ways.

Despite these promising behaviors, there exists room for further improvement in several areas, particularly decreasing junk food consumption for both youth participants and teen leaders and decreasing screen time for teens.

Evaluation Results and Recommendations

Findings from the valuation study are organized around six broad areas: program structure and leadership, curriculum and adaptations, family and community engagement, partnership and collaborations, teens as teachers, and diversity. Each section below contains a summary of relevant literature (“Evidence based practices”), findings from the Arizona evaluation study, and summary boxes highlighting successes, challenges, and ideas from the field related to each topic area.

Program structure and leadership

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

4-H Healthy Habits programs serve many different communities, with widely diverse social, economic, and cultural contexts. As such, state and local programs must adapt to the ever-evolving needs and limitations of the population that they serve in order to maintain effectiveness. Thus, the structure and leadership of health promotion programs must allow each individual program to make necessary adaptations to the programming. Indeed, research has shown that allowing for adaptations improves program outcomes, as one size does not fit all when dealing with complex social systems.

Successes

- State-level coordinators asked counties how many youth they could serve, then based their state goals for the grant on those numbers.
- States used a “mini grant” approach where the state operated in a de-centralized way, with each locality proposing and carrying out their own programming.
- Programs leveraged systems-level or proximity-based conveniences, such as upper and lower schools on adjacent campuses, to facilitate using teen leaders to deliver 4HHHY programming.

Challenges

- Teen Leader school schedules can make it difficult to engage them in delivering 4HHHY programming in elementary schools, especially when there are only a few teen leaders in an area.

Ideas from the field

- Working weekly with a career-readiness class in a local high school. The high school was in session Monday through Thursday, but a local K-8 school was in session five days a week. On Fridays, the high school students took their lessons to the elementary school and delivered the content to different classes throughout the day. As an additional benefit, training so many teen leaders at once helped mitigate scheduling issues.
- Using home-schooling youth to lead 4HHHY programming during the school day.

- Working with youth in before-school programs. "One program has Morning Walk and Talk and they use high school students as mentors. Kids can come early and they have healthy food and music and walk and talk."
- Running a soccer camp that both served youth and engaged teen leaders. According to those delivering the program, this approach successfully attracted youth who had not been previously engaged in 4-H, particularly Latinx youth.
- Creating a "tiny market," a small wooden structure on a trailer that was brought to different summer camp sites. Youth at the summer camps were able to learn about the produce, "shop" from the market, and then prepare the food. Teen leaders facilitated these activities.
- At the administrative level, having a leader who is passionate about the program and excellent at communicating with people in the field, helping them to track deadlines, acquire supplies, and identify new ways to engage youth.
- Having a lead county-level person who is a dedicated "outreach" person (i.e., they focus on reaching new audiences), rather than an already overloaded 4-H agent with traditional responsibilities.

Curriculum and adaptations

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Programs developed—and tested—with one set of youth may not work with all youth. The idea of program adaption to the culture of different communities has been linked with greater retention, ownership, and uptake of a program, among other benefits. Researchers now assume that adaptation is part of any dissemination process and 4-H Healthy Habits programs are likely no different with regard to the curricula they use. Adaptation is beneficial when dealing with a diverse group of students, staff, and settings, as it ensures and promotes efficacy and improves outcomes for participants. New thinking in the implementation field suggests that a focus on "best practices" may no longer be as useful as a focus on "best processes" for implementation. In other words, the effectiveness of a set of materials or fixed protocol may not be as useful in transferring knowledge across diverse communities as a set of processes for how to engage community members with the key constructs, and how to adapt the materials in different settings. A focus on processes highlights the need to know the "active ingredients" in a particular curriculum that are most linked to successful outcomes.

CURRICULA USED

4-H Healthy Habits programs used a wide array of curricula. The curricula most frequently mentioned by staff included:

- Up for the Challenge from the University of Maryland
- Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness (CHFFF) and its companion teen leadership piece Choose Health Action Teens (CHAT) from Cornell University
- Learn, Grow, Eat, & Go from the International Junior Master Gardener Program under Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
- Yoga for Kids from the University of Arkansas

Multiple LGUs also mentioned using *Youth Advocates for Health (YA 4-H!)* from Oregon State University with teen leaders. Additional curricula mentioned with less frequency included:

- 4-H Get Moving from Rutgers University
- Cooking with Care from the University of Georgia
- Kids in the Kitchen from University of Missouri
- Quest for Health from Clemson University
- On the Move to Better Health from North Dakota State University
- Health Rocks! from the University of Nebraska
- 4-H STEPS to a Healthy Teen from Michigan State University
- Teen Cuisine from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Virginia State University
- Cooking Matters from Share our Strength/No Kid Hungry
- Junior Chef from the University of Illinois



- Vegetable Garden from Purdue University

ADAPTATIONS FOR CULTURAL RELEVANCE

As described in the opening sections of this paper, youth of color are involved in both 4HHHY and 4HHLA programming. Given the diversity of participants and teen leaders curricula and materials may be better received and more effective when adapted to be culturally appropriate to the intended audience.

Staff most frequently reported that these adaptations involved changing the kinds of foods prepared to be appropriate for the youth involved, including foods commonly used with refugee or ethnic minority communities. For those working in rural communities, a common theme involved only including foods that were readily available in those environments with limited food resources. Finally, a few staff noted that they had translated materials that they use into other languages.

Where adaptations had been made, they were remarked on by the youth. For instance, one teen noted that his program was the first that he had been involved in that introduced Hispanic heroes and musicians as part of the curriculum and that he "love[d] how the program includes my culture in programming."

Successes

- Programs used a variety of evidence-based curricula.
- Staff saw curricula that involved a high level of interactivity and/or food demonstrations as the most engaging for youth.
- Adapting recipes to focus on ingredients and recipes that were in keeping with the culture and accessibility of local populations helped ensure activities were relevant to youths' everyday lives.

Challenges

- Given that programs often served the same youth year after year, it can be a challenge to keep updating lessons (or find new ones) to keep participants engaged.
- Strict fidelity to an evidence-based curriculum can be impractical, given time constraints or a repeat audience. A balance needs to be found between adapting evidence-based curricula and assuring that adaptive implementation is tapping into the "active ingredients" of a curriculum.
- Despite reaching diverse audiences with programming, there does not appear to be a widespread practice or process for cultural adaptation of materials or activities.

Ideas from the field

- Using cooking competition programs (which staff noted were particularly exciting to youth) to expose youth to food safety, food preparation practices, and novel foods.
- Hooking audiences at events (e.g., county and local health fairs) by using activities that were intriguing to both youth participants and adults such as 'blender bike' and 'rethink your drink.'

Family and community engagement

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Research shows that engaging participant families has many benefits including connecting the program to the community, increasing cultural relativity, and improving meeting the needs of the participants. Using community resources, such as translators and community volunteers in meaningful ways effectively deals with cultural barriers, as this builds trust between participants and community partners and promotes PYD because the program becomes informed by the community. Consistent messaging about health across the spectrum of where youth are involved reinforces knowledge of healthy living best practices. Engaging both parents and the broader community align with the goals of 4-H Healthy Habits programs.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In addition to family engagement, many teen leader activities involved community-based work, such as hosting events and staffing booths at larger events, festivals, recreational events, cooking competitions, and community gardens. This also provided opportunities for outreach to family members and the greater community.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY SUPPORT TO PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING

Family support can be important for recruitment and retention in youth development programs, particularly among youth of color. Teens surveyed generally agreed that their families were happy that they were 4-H Healthy Living Ambassadors. Parents provide transportation and often volunteer in programs that are outside their work days.

Findings suggest that the 4-H Healthy Habits programming is helping to inform families of diverse backgrounds about healthy practices and that families of many backgrounds philosophically support their children's participation in these programs.

Successes

- Families were engaged in 4-H Healthy Habits activities in numerous ways, such via newsletters and invitations to showcases and other program events.
- Engagement of family, friends, and the larger community were accomplished through hosting or appearing at community-based events where a broader audience was accessible.
- 4-H Healthy Habits programming around shopping and food preparation was perceived as beneficial by teen leaders of color, particularly African American youth.
- Teen leaders in 4-H Healthy Habits brought information about cooking and healthy living to others and made efforts to engage their families in healthier practices.

Challenges

- Most programs' family involvement strategies provide a low dose of information or involvement, which can make it harder to alter the family context for health behaviors.
- Few opportunities to actively engage family members (i.e., beyond attending an event) were noted.

Ideas from the field

- Using festivals, recreational events, cooking competitions, and community gardens to provide avenues for extended outreach to families and community members.
- Hosting family-centered events where youth and their families learn about 4-H Healthy Habits content regarding physical activity and healthy eating together.
- Hosting family "literacy and wellness" events that address multiple areas where family engagement is beneficial.
- Providing a meal to families to incentivize attendance and demonstrate nutritious foods.
- Planning 4-H Healthy Habits activities at existing school events, such as Back to School night.
- Having parents (and the teen and the 4-H leader) sign a contract committing to supporting their teen's participation in 4HHLA to help clarify expectations for family support.

Partnerships and collaborations

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Partnerships and collaborations can be instrumental in promoting PYD through the provision of vital spaces, important tools, and key opportunities for youth to make an impact in their communities. Partnerships with schools and after school programs have been found to be most impactful for health interventions, especially in obesity prevention. Effective youth programs provide opportunities for utilization of new life skills in collaborative action within



community partnerships, encouraging and promoting PYD, as they make a valued impact on the world. Partner organizations can also help to address the unique needs of families by providing services that the program may not have readily available, such as translations for non-English speakers. Beyond schools, afterschool program sites and summer camps were important partnerships for LGUs where 4-H Healthy Habits programs were located at sites including local Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, and recreation departments.

Collaborations with other 4-H and Cooperative Extension entities (e.g. EFNEP, SNAP-Ed, 4-H alum, state specialists) can be helpful for training, mentorship, and leadership opportunities. However, not all LGUs had extensive collaboration across Extension with “siloeing” limiting opportunities for collaboration.

Particular businesses provided support, such as local grocery and Walmart stores that had supplied ingredients or other in-kind donations, as well as hosted or sponsored events. Local medical organizations also helped provide volunteers and monetary support. Other LGUs worked with certain governmental or non-profit organizations such as housing authorities or refugee organizations to reach specific underserved and at-risk populations. Staff highlighted the need for a good working relationship with partners because they often serve as “gatekeepers” to the populations they serve. Churches were particularly important partners in many rural areas as they were central locations that were accessible to youth.

Overall, staff were quick to recognize the contribution of many community partners and the importance of community support. As one staff member said, “It makes a huge difference if everyone is on the same page when it comes to the health and well-being that are involved.”

CHAMPIONS

Staff also emphasized the importance of maintaining close relationships with both local schools and school districts through consistent communication and working with key “champions” who believe in the program. Speaking to this common theme, one staff member shared that “collaboration with someone at the school who’s a champion for the program and the kids has allowed the program to do well and to build from one class to all the health classes.” Multiple staff emphasized that persistence can be key, recommending that programs remember that building partnerships takes time. School principals were commonly identified as key figures whose support was crucial.

Overall, nearly three-quarters of staff surveyed rated partnerships with individuals as “very important.”

Successes

- 4-H Healthy Habits programs leveraged a wide array of partnerships to enhance their reach. Among the partnerships that a majority of survey respondents deemed vital are (in order of ranked importance): K-12 schools, individual champions, other 4-H programs, afterschool programs, summer camps, other Extension programs, and participants’ families.
- Identifying and nurturing relationships with specific, enthusiastic champions within partner organizations was a key to success for many programs.
- Successful partnerships were also often attributed to one well-connected, well-liked CE staff person who knows the local residents well and had useful connections.
- Programs made smart partnerships with places that offered systems-level or proximity-based conveniences (e.g., by taking advantage of co-located lower and upper schools or afterschool programs near to the high school, the need for transportation was minimized).
- Local control of programs means that programs leveraged partnerships that were available and useful to them to maximize reach and engagement.
- School partnerships provide a fairly consistent audience for programming.

Challenges

- Relationship building is a time intensive process, and for budget strapped programs, or those without “champions” in the community, building those relationships can be a real challenge.
- The sustainability of a program can be problematic when a connection rests on a single enthusiastic champion.



- Using relevant adult partners to disseminate the 4HHHY programming does not always work well in partnership with engaging teen leaders since they may not be as available during school hours.

Ideas from the field

- Connecting 4-H staff with professionals who can enrich programming, such as chefs and content experts.
- Pairing teen leaders with Extension nutrition educators (or EFNEP or SNAP-Ed educators outside of 4-H) and college students studying nutrition to teach material in the 4HHHY program can support implementation.
- Utilizing partnerships across 4-H, EFNEP, SNAP, and FCS to enhance training, outreach, and implementation of 4HHHY programming.
- Strategically partnering with organizations who serve audiences, especially typically hard-to-reach audiences (i.e., refugees, migrant farmworker families) that an LGU would like to engage.
- Thinking out-of-the-box to identify partner organizations, like a housing community.

Teens as Teachers

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Research has identified 10 key elements of teens as teachers programs: supportive adults, an active recruitment process, a strong curriculum for the teens to use in their teaching, initial training, ongoing training and support, attention to details and good communication, recognition and reward (including compensation), team building, ensuring success experiences, and feedback and evaluation

The teens as teachers model has been shown to be effective in cultivating a sense of responsibility, personal satisfaction, improving academic performance, and building teen leadership skills. Teens connect well with children and younger youth feel more comfortable asking teenagers than adults for help. While teenagers are effective teachers, youth-adult partnerships are essential for success with the amount of training before teens begin educating youth (10-30 hours) and ongoing training such as weekly follow-ups are key.

From a recruitment standpoint, many youth hear about and are more likely to consider opportunities in which their friends may also participate. A successful teens as teachers program promotes teen recruitment, as teens share their positive experiences with their friends and encourage them to join the program. Continued engagement is more likely in settings where youth had supportive adult relationships.

TEEN LEADER ENGAGEMENT

A key asset of 4-H Healthy Habits programs is that they not only disseminate information about healthy behaviors to communities, but they leverage the longstanding tradition of empowering teens to deliver the message. LGUs have devised an array of approaches to organizing the teens that meet their local needs and capacities, from using the format of 4-H clubs to organize their teen leaders or treating 4HHLA programming like an individual project for traditional 4-H members, to organizing teen leaders to engage with summer camps.

No matter the format, the teen leader component of 4-H Healthy Habits programming was prized by many LGUs. The ability of the teens to connect with others in their communities while also growing as individuals was enthusiastically praised by adults and valued by teens. Opportunities to grow in the program and to teach younger children were the two main reasons cited by teens as to why they wanted to continue as 4-H Healthy Living Ambassadors in the future.

TEEN LEADER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

Although the teens as teachers component received high praise from LGUs, it was not always an easy component to run. Only 19 percent of adult respondents strongly agreed that they had an easy time recruiting teen leaders, and 16 percent had a difficult time. Some LGUs struggled with recruiting enough teens

The majority of teen leaders first heard about 4-H Healthy Living Ambassadors through a 4-H leader. However, while nearly all white teens heard about the program through a 4-H leader or a friend or peer, non-white teens more

frequently heard about the program through teachers or afterschool or summer program staff. This suggests that recruitment through schools and afterschool and summer program may be important for outreach to youth of color.

Despite a relatively small proportion of teens reporting that they first heard about the program from friends or peers, nearly all teens reported that they encouraged friends or classmates to join their 4-H Healthy Living Ambassador program. Many 4HHLAs reported that they were motivated to convince their friends to join because of the positive experiences they themselves had ("It's fun"; "they will like it"), but also because they saw value in the program overall ("[it's a] good cause"; because as teens we can make a difference"). From the teens' standpoint, some of the appealing aspects of the program were the incentive of attending the national conference, major events like hiking in a national park, helping others, and "the idea of teenagers and adults working together as equals."

INCENTIVES AND COMPENSATION FOR TEEN LEADERS

"Recognition and reward" is one of the 10 elements of successful teens as teachers programs, taking many formats according to the LGU to attend certain big-ticket events, like the National Youth Summit for Healthy Living or a camping trip, were incentives. Smaller incentives were offered to all participants at some LGUs, like an official t-shirt or the chance to earn a Fitbit if they volunteer a certain number of times. Other LGUs took it a step further and paid each participating teen for their time.

COMMUNICATION WITH TEEN LEADERS

A crucial part of running an effective 4HHLA program is communicating with teen leaders in a timely and reliable way. LGUs developed multiple methods for connecting with teens, whether they were spread across the state or met fairly regularly. Across staff surveyed, in-person was the most frequently cited form of communication (35 percent), followed by email (19 percent), phone calls (19 percent), texting (13 percent), and Facebook (13 percent). At least one case study LGU uses a texting app called Remind to send group texts. Approaches to virtual meetings included Zoom and Google video chats and a Slack channel. Staff at case study LGUs who convened their teens regularly (at least once a month), whether through in-person meetings or virtually, reported that these regular meetings helped to build a sense of community among their teen leaders.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES FOR TEEN LEADERS

Nearly all of the teen leaders engaged through surveys and focus groups through our primary data collection viewed the program in a highly positive light. Public speaking skills, leadership skills, teaching skills, and their ability to set and achieve goals were important to the Teen Ambassadors in their work. Many teens recounted their growth through the program as they had opportunities to practice these skills in a supportive environment. Teens most frequently observed growth when they were part of a program that allowed them to be directly involved in the delivery of 4HHY programming to youth participants. Development in these areas is one of the key goals of PYD, as expressed through the Competence and Confidence goals in the 6 C's framework and need for skill-building opportunities in the 'Big Three' and eight essential elements framework of youth development.

These findings from our primary data collection mirror those captured in the 2016-2017 Common Measures. Teen leaders were asked to rate their ability on a variety of leadership skills; on average, teen leaders reported improvements across all categories of leadership and communication skills. The highest average change scores occurred among African American teen leaders, followed by Latinx teens. Native American teens and non-Hispanic White teens had lower average change scores, but still showed improvement on average across all areas.

Results suggest that 4HHLA programs promote PYD through skill-building and the fostering of supportive youth-adult partnerships. Based both on published research and qualitative findings in focus groups, programs with a robust teens as teachers component that directly involved teens in the delivery of 4HHY programming to younger children supported the development of confidence and competence in teen's own leadership abilities.

Successes

- Teen leaders showed marked improvement in their own confidence and competence in their leadership abilities. African American teens showed the greatest improvement in these areas, and Latinx and Native American youth showed the most improvement in public speaking and discussion skills.
- Nearly all teens reported experiencing a successful youth adult partnership by the end of the program.
- Engaging teens to national events allows them to see the big picture of 4-H Healthy Living programs nationwide and further develops their leadership skills.



- From the teens' standpoint, some of the appealing aspects of the program were the incentive of attending the national conference, major events like hiking in a national park, helping others, and "the idea of teenagers and adults working together as equals."
- Reaching out to teens who are not already engaged in 4-H programs was noted as helpful in places where 4-H teens are often overcommitted.

Challenges

- The many time commitments of teens can prevent them from participating in 4HHLA programs.
- Implementing an effective teens as teachers program requires intensive investment on the part of adult staff and volunteers.

Ideas from the field

- Having a broad range of activities helps keep teens interested. Some teens love gardening and farming activities and others do not, but the kids who do not enjoy gardening may love cooking.
- Being willing to actively reach out and communicate with the teens is important. Developing a rapport with teens and reaching out to them as individuals helps keep teens engaged.
- Using community connections and being intentional about reaching out to youth who are not already engaged in 4-H. "Our coordinator targeted kids for recruitment from her connections with families, etc. in the community. Most have never been from 4-H; we offer the opportunity to kids in 4-H clubs, but we're really looking for kids who have never been involved."
- Implementing a simple application as a screener to make sure that the prospective teen leader can handle basic communication and follow-through.
- Remembering to make room for fun. Staff reported that a mix of leadership development activities and "just for fun" activities helped recruit and retain teen leaders. Having a mix of farming, nutrition, and outdoor adventure opportunities helped one program retain a high number of kids both throughout the program year and between program years.
- Persistence helps! Even if a teen drops off the radar for a while, continue to reach out – they often come back.
- Providing opportunities for teens to connect with one another, as in a state-wide training. This helps give teens a sense of bigger purpose and community.
- Using technology to keep in touch with teens, whether via Slack channels or video meetings, helps teen leaders stay connected, particularly in programs where teens were spread across a large area.
- Having 'capstone activities,' such as a hiking trip in a national park at one LGU, can provide an incentive, an opportunity for teens to set and meet goals, and a team-building activity while promoting physical activity. Staff at this particular LGU felt this activity was an essential ingredient of their program.

Diversity

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Multiple studies have stressed the importance of creating programs that are relevant to youth from diverse backgrounds, that have flexible participation requirements, that address the economic needs of participants, and that respect the ethnicity and culture of all youth involved in order to recruit and retain youth of color. In this study of 4-H Healthy Habits programs, we found that:

- One hundred percent of staff and volunteers agreed that youth of color and both boys and girls were welcomed in their programs and that youth of color were encouraged to be teen leaders.
- Multiple LGUS found that partnering with agencies that already serve populations of color was an effective way to increase reach among youth of color.
- Programs that were most successful at engaging underserved and minority youth typically located their programming in areas with high proportions of minorities.

- Nearly all teen leaders surveyed felt that their programs were welcoming to all teens, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or language spoken. Multilingual teens and youth of color were especially confident that their programs were welcoming.
- Large proportions of respondents indicated that existing racial diversity among their staff and volunteers is an asset to their program.
- Minority-serving institutions appear to be particularly adept at reaching youth of color.

DIVERSITY AS A CONSCIOUS GOAL

Among staff surveyed, two-thirds (68 percent) reported that they actively addressed racial or ethnic diversity in their program.

The predominant explanation for how they achieved this was by locating in diverse communities and being welcoming to all, which included a substantial proportion of youth of color by virtue of local demographics. In addition to community demographics, another theme that emerged was intentional partnering with organizations (e.g., churches, after school program, schools in specific neighborhoods) who served students of color. When asked about this directly, the majority (60 percent) of staff indicated that their program considers the racial or ethnic composition of partner organizations.

While an intentional focus on racial diversity was a theme for many, qualitative data also revealed that some programs expressly did not focus on intentionally reaching youth of color, taking a “color-blind” approach to their programming. This statement was characteristic of this group of programs: “In my position I am not looking at ‘color’ of any youth. My programming is aimed at YOUTH not ‘of color.’” A number of staff felt that since the content of 4-H Healthy Habits curriculum was relevant to all youth, a particular focus on youth of color was not necessary.

Across most LGUs, both adults and teens felt that their programs had room for growth in terms of reaching youth from diverse backgrounds. Over two-thirds of staff (68 percent) and nearly two-thirds of teen leaders (62 percent) surveyed agreed on some level that their program could do more to include youth of color. About a third of both adults (35 percent) and teens (28 percent) strongly agreed with that statement.

Higher proportions of youth of color and multilingual teens strongly agreed that their programs could do more to reach youth of color when compared to their white or only English-speaking peers. Overall, about three-quarters of youth of color (72 percent) and multilingual teens (77 percent) agreed that their programs could be doing more, compared to 53 percent of white teens and 58 percent of teens who speak English only. These discrepancies suggest that there is continued need for improvement of programs in the area of diversity and inclusion.

DIVERSITY OF TEEN LEADERS AND YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Across 4-H Healthy Habits programs nationwide, teen leaders were generally less diverse than 4HHHY participants involved in the programs. This is likely due to the structure of the program in many states. The 4HHHY program often partners with local schools, after-school, and summer programs to serve entire classes where the children enrolled tend to mirror the demographics of the local community. Conversely, teen leaders reflect a sub-population of students who must be recruited, trained, and able (in many cases) to volunteer their time and secure their own transportation. Also, in many places the 4HHLA program drew on existing 4-H clubs, which are historically largely white. Compared to the overall youth population of the states with funded 4-H Healthy Habits programs, both African-American and Native American are over-represented as participants and teen leaders. However, Latinx youth remain greatly underrepresented as both participants and as teen leaders compared to their prevalence in the population of the states with 4-H Healthy Habits programs.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS NEEDED TO CONTINUE OUTREACH TO YOUTH OF COLOR

There is a general lack of ability to provide transportation, but staff would like to have that ability. Language barriers in terms of translated materials and the lack of Spanish language at national events are also problematic.

Many of the teen leaders reached through surveys and focus groups had suggestions for how to make their programs more inclusive, such as: visiting schools in various sites and communities, contacting youth cultural centers, holding more community service events, distributing fliers, providing emotional support for the youth of color, and advertising more broadly, including ensuring that it is stated that “everyone is welcome.” Several teen leaders recognized that barriers such as cost might hinder some youth from participating in the program, though many states do offer waivers or fee assistance. Teens recognized the need to partner with organizations that serve diverse youth. One respondent

remarked, "Our programs are enlisted into schools that focus on agriculture and weave their way back to new curriculum with 4-H Healthy Habits. If this were taught in the schools that were more diverse, there could be a possibility of more enrollment [of youth of color]."

Successes

- One hundred percent of staff and volunteers agreed that youth of color and both boys and girls were welcomed in their programs and that youth of color were encouraged to be teen leaders.
- Nearly all teen leaders surveyed felt that their programs were welcoming to all teens, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or language spoken.
- Multilingual teens and youth of color were especially confident that their programs were welcoming.
- Multiple LGUs found that partnering with agencies who already serve populations of color was an effective way to increase their reach among youth of color.
- Minority-serving institutions served large populations of minority youth through their 4HHLA and 4HHY programming.
- Large proportions of respondents indicated that existing racial diversity among their staff and volunteers is an asset to their program.

Challenges

- It was not abundantly clear to all LGUs that the Walmart Foundation sub-grants were hoping to increase racial and ethnic diversity in 4-H Healthy Habits programs.
- Some of the marketing and outreach materials linked to existing curricula do not reflect the diversity of youth participating in 4-H Healthy Habits programming.
- Some programs struggled to translate materials into other languages, particularly Spanish.
- Reaching 'hard to reach' audiences can be expensive, as it requires more staff time and supports for youth, such as transportation assistance.
- The majority of teens and adults felt that their programs could be doing more to include youth of color.

Ideas from the field

- One LGU held specific retreats for youth from Native American, Latino, African and African American, and Asian American cultures (one retreat for each group) on their university campus. These youth also participated in 4-H camps and 4-H Healthy Habits projects as well as culturally-tailored activities.
- Prioritize working within schools that serve high proportions of youth of color.
- In areas where language barriers might make seat-learning more difficult, "teens created hands-on activities in the garden such as weeding, watering, planting seeds, holding worms, and playing games."
- Suggestions directly from teens about what would help their group become more diverse included: hold meetings in a more accessible location; do more outreach through the school and through other events; include more social media outreach; and post flyers in areas frequented by teens outside of school (e.g., Starbucks).
- Providing transportation, either through directly transporting youth or providing public transit cards, helped reduce barriers to participation.
- A camp for children with special needs involving social-emotional and physical health was especially rewarding for staff.

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