



Building a Team within a 4-H Club

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Background

Katzenbach and Smith (1986) define a team as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and a common approach that they hold themselves mutually accountable. Often, 4-H clubs must operate as a team to complete such tasks as community service projects, fund raisers, fair booth, or float design, etc. However, it does not occur spontaneously. Team building within a 4-H club needs to be fostered deliberately. Organized 4-H clubs involve a number of individuals representing a variety of ages, years of experience, maturity, gender, etc., working together to reach a common goal (educational activities, preparation for the county fair, community service projects, etc.). Adult volunteers and 4-H youth often collaborate to provide positive team building experiences.

Forming a Team—It’s a Process

Bruce Tuckman’s Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing model is arguably the most recognized model for team development. Tuckman’s theory outlines how teams begin formation and transition to problem solving. According to Tuckman (1965), there is a natural progression in the formation of any team or small group of people.



1. Forming

In the team formation phase, a group of 4-H youth and adult volunteers are initially brought together. This likely will occur at the beginning of the 4-H club year, the start of a special community service project, or the formation of a new committee. In the early stages of team

formation, 4-H youth and adults volunteers are generally “guarded” when learning about one another. Effective use of “ice breakers” activities reduces the apprehension group members have during the formation stage. “Ice breakers” are commonly described as stimulating and thought provoking activities that educate and entertain with the intent of leaving a permanent and long lasting impression while increasing communication and cohesiveness of those involved (Millet, 2009). A great resource for identifying effective “ice breakers” activities can be found at <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~bdg/>.

2. Storming

After 4-H club members and adult volunteers are initially acquainted, they begin to explore their roles and responsibilities. Differences in goals, objectives, and needs begin to emerge. At this stage a group is determining their priorities, establishing leadership roles, and is working out differences. Often times, simple team building activities can begin to expose individual member’s leadership styles, team work abilities, and communication skills. Reference this resource to get some examples of team building activities: <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~bdg/>.

Techniques for Building a Team within a 4-H Club

- Involve everyone in setting up the club’s goals and program for the year.
- Set high standards for 4-H youth and adult volunteers—expect them to do their best.
- Listen to the ideas of 4-H youth and adult volunteers.
- Delegate tasks and responsibilities.
- Never ask someone to take on a task that you would never do.
- Celebrate individual contributions and group accomplishments.

- Never diminish, ridicule, or discourage 4-H youth or adult volunteers in a team.
- Confront problems in private.
- Practice (conduct team building experiences as a recreation activity).

It is important that adult volunteers have the ability to identify strengths within clubs and capitalize on them for success. Many of these strengths will be exposed during team building activities. Adult volunteers need to be deliberate about observing 4-H youth during these team building activities. Characteristics of effective team leaders are often exposed in the “forming” and “storming” stages through the use of team building activities. Some of these skills are referenced in the “Effective Team Leaders” section below.

3. Norming

At this stage a 4-H club has committed to the project. Roles, responsibilities, and goals have been established. Membership in the club is inclusive and the group begins to see itself as a team of interconnected parts working toward a common goal. As team members work out their differences, they have more time and energy to spend on a project. Norming includes the following characteristics:

Effective Team Leaders

- Clear vision of the team’s role in accomplishing the club’s goals
- Project management and work-planning skills
- Conflict management and problem-solving skills
- Understanding of how to encourage people to work together
- Skills to manage change and build team competencies
- Ability to “get out of the way” when necessary (let them do their job)
- Willingness to listen and admit when you are wrong
- Effective communication skills

4. Performing

The team is focused and achieves group goals. Both 4-H youth and adult volunteers are contributing, objectives are being met, and progress is being made. By now the 4-H club has developed its relationships and outlined

clear expectations. The 4-H club’s ability to implement change and execute ideas will be the measure of success at this stage change. Performing includes the following characteristics:

Characteristics of Effective Team Members

- Knowledge, skills, and experience
- Good interpersonal and communication skills
- High degree of motivation
- Good conflict-management skills
- Ability to adapt to new situations
- Dependability
- Initiative

Conclusion

Team building within 4-H clubs is not something that comes without effort. Such group activities require that a sense of trust be built between participants as well as a feeling of shared responsibility. The 4-H club environment can offer unique opportunities for team building experiences for youth when adult volunteers provide the structure for it. These experiences will prepare 4-H youth for the real world. Overall, the success of the 4-H club can be measured by the success of the team work displayed by its members and adult volunteers.

Note: The team building process may need to be restarted as new members join, members leave, adult volunteers change, and/or club officers change.

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