

Ohio 4-H Workforce Development Plan 12/6/2019

Background

Workforce development is and will continue to be a hot topic. Employers and our communities need skilled workers with both the technical, as well as the applied or “soft” skills to grow and adapt. K-12 and higher education institutions recognize they are major systems in the development of youth becoming college and career-ready, but often there is little or no connection between the education and employer systems. Ohio 4-H has an opportunity to bridge this education to employment journey by being part of a higher education institution that is focused on such a relevant and broadly encompassing industry such as agriculture!

Nearly 40% of employers indicate that they cannot find enough people with the skills they need, even for entry level positions. ¹

The Ohio State University (OSU) College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES), which includes OSU Extension and 4-H, recently emphasized the theme of workforce development. As part of the [Vice President’s Conversation on the Future of Extension](#) (2015) there was recognition that a skills gap existed between employer’s needs and how potential workers are prepared. In order to bridge that gap, a systems approach including employers, K-12 and higher education was required. The focus of this “conversation” was to anticipate the needs of Ohioans in 2035 and to position Extension to meet those needs, however, no specific actions were identified. In 2019, a new CFAES Partnerships unit was created to support partnerships and workforce development.

In 2018, CFAES Vice President and Dean Cathann Kress included a specific charge for Ohio 4-H to better connect with workforce development, specifically making connections with those programs and careers supported by the college.

OSU Extension identified workforce development as one of six [priority areas](#). In 2018, 30,500 youth improved their leadership and communication skills through workforce prep activities, also learning how to lead a group or club, finish a job they started and to be successful workers in the future. No specific leadership has been identified for workforce development efforts across OSU Extension.

Ohio 4-H previously had an initiative focusing on workforce preparation (2006-13) that included developing a model and an active work group. Efforts evolved to improve the intentionality of camp counseling as a workforce preparation program (CampWorks 2010-12). There was significant focus on building 21st century skills through the camp counselor experience and helping youth understand and articulate they were practicing 21st century skills.

National and state level efforts are in place to focus on workforce development. [National Institute of Food and Agriculture](#) (NIFA) has placed an emphasis on it and the Ohio Department of Education hosts a [Career Connections framework](#) that has many similarities to the Ohio 4-H workforce preparation model.

In July 2019, the state 4-H office dedicated resources to support a temporary, 25% appointment to create a plan to guide the next three-five years for Ohio 4-H workforce development efforts. This plan will focus on career and college readiness with an emphasis on career awareness and exploration specifically related to agricultural careers.



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The Process

The following activities were completed in preparation of an Ohio 4-H workforce development plan:

- Reviewed past Ohio 4-H Workforce Preparation Initiative efforts and the model created
- Reviewed national 4-H and other states for relevant approaches and program examples
- Reviewed survey of Ohio 4-H professionals (May 2019) for current workforce development and career connection programming
- Reviewed parallel organizations for connections, as well as current literature on workforce development
- Held discussions with multiple key stakeholders in 4-H and CFAES for new perspectives and opportunities
- Convened a 4-H workforce development advisory group

Driving Questions

Based on preliminary analysis of our stakeholders and research, below are some driving questions to focus the efforts of Ohio 4-H related to workforce development:

- **How do we more intentionally connect our Ohio 4-H efforts to career awareness and exploration, especially agriculture careers?**
- **How do we help our stakeholders understand the breadth of the agriculture industry and all the career opportunities available?**
- **How can Ohio 4-H help our participants understand the skills gap and position themselves for success?**

Findings

1. The commonly-held belief that “Everything in 4-H is workforce development” is challenging. By design, the 4-H program helps prepare youth to be caring, competent, contributing citizens and to practice soft skill development in real and meaningful ways. The difficulty lies in being able to articulate a common framework, path or program to accomplishing this skill development or to be able to quantify collective impact beyond local, independent efforts. Without a common structure and definition everyone is left to define their own experience and success.
2. Since 2012 there has been little focused effort in Ohio 4-H related to workforce development. The Teen Leadership Design Team has incorporated some of the workforce development language and emphasis into their plans.
3. There are currently many local 4-H efforts focused on workforce development (e.g., local industry programming, career fairs, college/campus tours, work-based learning approaches to camp counselors), but not much consistency or coordination beyond the local level. This makes it challenging to report impact or depth of programming across the state.



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Findings, continued

4. Until this temporary position, there was no one in 4-H/OSUE giving leadership or providing direction to workforce development efforts. This can confuse professionals as to know where to go for support, guidance, resources or quality control.
5. 4-H projects currently have a diffuse connection to workforce development in asking youth what skills they learned and how they may be valuable in the future. There is only one 4-H project focused solely on workforce development: “Am I Ready for Work,” launched in 2015. A few projects (e.g., entomology, sheep, graphic design) also showcase specific workplace skills and careers. There are some potential workforce development project books currently in development.
6. Workforce Preparation Day at the Ohio State Fair (offered since 2006) is an annual competition open to any Ohio 4-H who participated in a workforce development program (project or experience). Annual participation is around 30 youth.
7. The Ohio Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation, Ohio Board of Regents and the Ohio Department of Education launched Career Connections in 2012. It includes a K-12 Framework and formal graduation requirements for all Ohio students. All school districts are required to have a Business Advisory Council to help inform their workforce development efforts.

Recommendations

1. **Adopt the [Career Connections Framework](#)** and use the language of the 14 skills that make up the [OhioMeansJobs Readiness Seal](#). **Promote completion of the Readiness Seal** with 4-H high school participants, especially those in 4-H leadership roles.
2. **Create tip sheets** for professionals and volunteers about helping youth better articulate their 4-H experience as it relates to workforce and 21st century skills. Specific emphasis placed on language for resumes, cover letters, applications, interviews, etc.
3. **Identify a point of contact** to lead workforce development efforts. Ideally, this is a 50% appointment for a state specialist who is part of the state 4-H office team and connected with CFAES recruitment and admissions. Other staffing options could work with significant investment.
4. Ohio 4-H should **create a work group or design team** focused on workforce development providing resources, guidance and curriculum.
5. Partner Ohio 4-H with Learning and Organizational Development to **provide professional development** focused on college/career readiness. This could take the form of an in-service, online cohort, videos, etc.
6. **Identify high-level evaluation outcomes** that coordinate and unite our local 4-H workforce development efforts. Find consistencies in programs across the state that can be reported and shared. Being sensitive to maintaining the unique, local offerings will be important. Connecting with local industry is critical with successful workforce development efforts and Ohio is highly diverse so a common curriculum or program that is industry specific may be challenging to implement on a state scale. Partner with OSU Extension and the Learning and Organizational Development Unit.
7. **Use the College and Career Readiness Survey** as part of the National 4-H Common Measures evaluation system for evaluation of appropriate programs.
8. **Host a campus-based, multi-day 4-H event** focused on workforce development and careers connected to CFAES. Target audience would be rising 8-9 graders.



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Recommendations, continued**9. Identify big opportunities related to curriculum/project books:**

- a. Increase the quantity and scope of workforce development specific project books
- b. Build a career awareness component in all project books (potentially in the planning or reflection phase of project- may be done as an insert for existing project books or factored into templates for new)
- c. Involve industry professionals as judges and project book reviewers
- d. Utilize Career Connections (ODE) language for skills (connects with Readiness Seal)
- e. Depending on the project, develop complementary short, engaging videos featuring the work of our own faculty and staff experts.

10. **Create videos focused on career awareness** and produced by youth. Such efforts offer an opportunity to share new and engaging career opportunities.

11. **Enhance and refresh a web-based resource area** and make it publicly available. Ideally this would be public-facing and focused on skill development and career awareness (careers broadly with special emphasis on agricultural and food system careers).

12. **Explore connections with youth entrepreneurship** and identify appropriate curriculum, partnerships or programs to promote.

13. **Integrate critical technology skills** (e.g., search engine skills; awareness of and competence on social media; the ability to use a word processing program, populating and reading a spreadsheet, and creating a professional presentation) that apply to the workforce into multiple aspects of the 4-H experience.

14. **Explore credential or credit-based opportunities** for high school youth (e.g., college credit plus) for leadership experiences.

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¹Laboissiere, M. & Mourshed, M. (February 2017). Closing the skills gap: Creating workforce-development programs that work for everyone. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/closing-the-skills-gap-creating-workforce-development-programs-that-work-for-everyone>



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