Organizational Analysis for NC 4-H

Sarah Kocher and Caroline Goss

PRT 506

Final Paper - Option 1

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Organizational context

About North Carolina 4-H and its mission

North Carolina 4-H is a dynamic organization serving youth ages 5-18 through informal education and delivered by N.C. Cooperative Extension. According to the national strategic plan, "4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnership with caring adults.

The mission of 4-H is to provide meaningful opportunities for all youth and adults to work together to create sustainable community change. This is accomplished within three primary content areas, or mission areas – civic engagement and leadership, healthy living, and science. These mission areas reiterate the founding purposes of Extension through agriculture (e.g., community leadership, quality of life, and technology transfer) in the context of 21st century challenges and opportunities" (National 4-H Council, n.d.).

NC 4-H values are reflected by the four H's: head, heart, hands and health. 4-H values education and critical thinking, and it aims to develop young people emotionally to be good friends and citizens in their communities. In the spirit of hands, service to others is another value within the organization. Pairing with the last H, 4-H values the health and safety of members, volunteers and local communities.

4-H is the nation's largest youth development organization operated through Cooperative Extension and led by 4-H professionals and dedicated volunteers. Professionals implement educational programs and manage administrative functions like financial management, marketing and risk management. 4-H volunteers also carry out a variety of educational programs and support young people, ages 5-18, as caring adults. Educational topics include civic engagement, leadership, healthy living, and science.

In North Carolina, there are 159 county-based, 4-H professionals (if all positions are filled) and 21 professionals who work at a statewide level. These professionals, including 4-H agents and 4-H program assistants, work relatively autonomously within their county under direct supervision of their

County Extension Director (CED), but these professionals also operate under the direction of Dr. Yoder, State 4-H Program Leader, and Dr. Bonanno, NC State Extension Director.

Distribution of County-Based 4-H Professionals

Source: NC State Extension. (2022). Our County Centers. Retrieved September 2, 2022
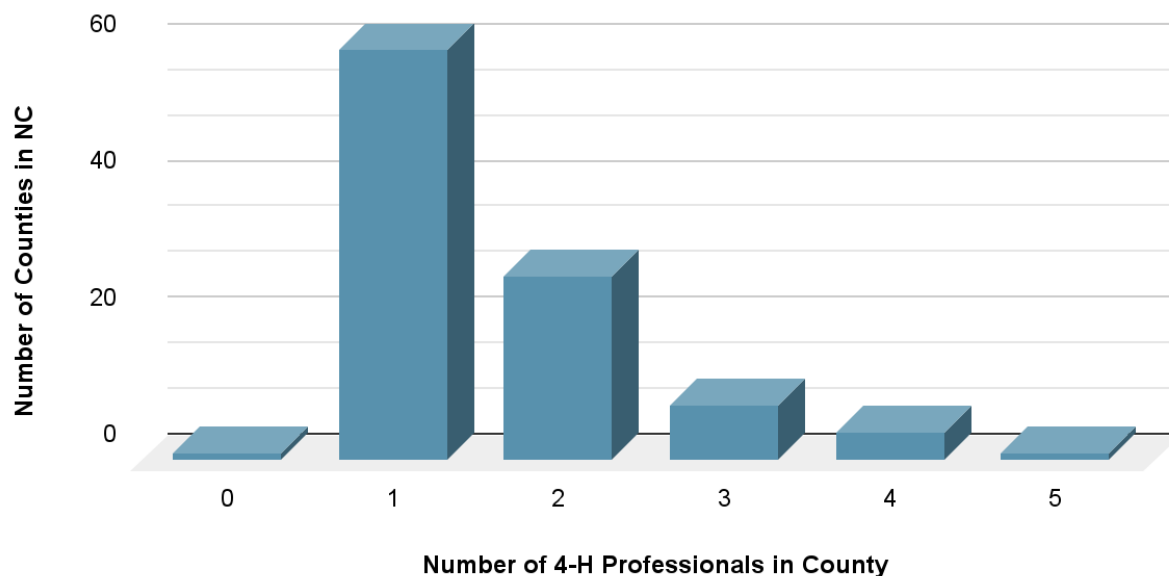
Purpose of analysis

NC 4-H is an applicable organization to study because its impacts are far reaching. Youth in every county in North Carolina are influenced by its programs, and these programs contribute to the positive development of young people, their families, communities, and beyond. In addition, many public and private dollars are utilized by 4-H programs in the state. In 2021, 4-H professionals in North Carolina reported $4,311,173.70 in additional fiscal resources outside of public funding. Of that $3,305,852.87 was in the form of contracts or grants, which require high levels of accountability for the receiving parties (NC State Extension, 2022).

Given the many positive impacts of 4-H on the young person as a whole, it is important to identify challenges that may threaten the organization and identify opportunities for improvement so that the high impact work of 4-H can continue.
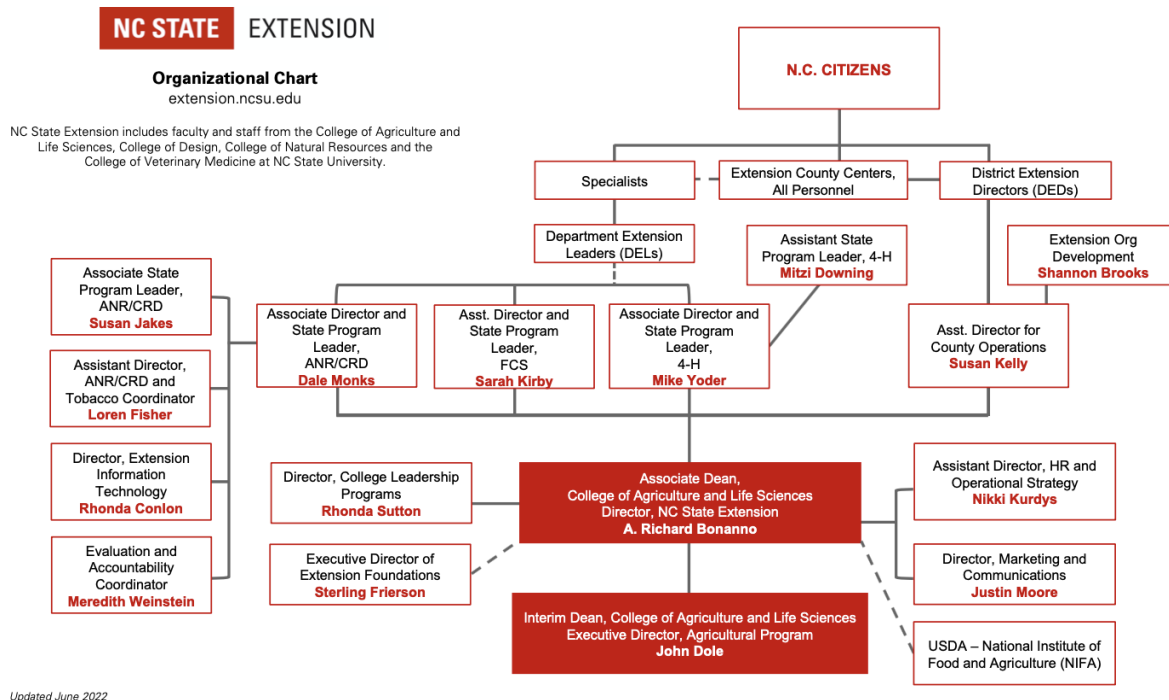
This analysis seeks to identify organizational problems within NC 4-H and reframe those in a way that is conducive to long-lasting positive youth development throughout the state. Specifically, this study will examine communication gaps that exist within the organization and to stakeholders, contributing to reduced efficiency and informing public perception. We will also examine whether NC 4-H operates as a closed system moreso than an open system that responds to the changing environment of youth development.

North Carolina 4-H through the four frames

Structural frame

N.C. Cooperative Extension's organizational chart is reflective of a hierarchical structure flipped upside down, where North Carolina citizens are at the top of the chain informing programming objectives. Then it flows all the way down to the authoritative roles of the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at NC State University and top-level managers.

For the most part, NC 4-H works well within this structure, and when executed properly, its customers do inform how 4-H goes about planning programs and deciding what needs to be addressed at the county level. Needs assessments conducted at the county level identify priorities and help inform planning. 4-H professionals have autonomy at the county level similar to the Divisionalized Form in which as long as NC 4-H delivers in meeting county needs in line with Extension objectives, divisions like counties and program areas have relatively "free rein" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 85).

NC STATE EXTENSION

Organizational Chart
extension.ncsu.edu

NC State Extension includes faculty and staff from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Design, College of Natural Resources and the College of Veterinary Medicine at NC State University.

N.C. CITIZENS

Specialists — Extension County Centers, All Personnel — District Extension Directors (DEDs)

Department Extension Leaders (DELs)

Assistant State Program Leader, 4-H
Mitzi Downing

Extension Org Development
Shannon Brooks

Associate State Program Leader, ANR/CRD
Susan Jakes

Associate Director and State Program Leader, ANR/CRD
Dale Monks

Asst. Director and State Program Leader, FCS
Sarah Kirby

Associate Director and State Program Leader, 4-H
Mike Yoder

Asst. Director for County Operations
Susan Kelly

Assistant Director, ANR/CRD and Tobacco Coordinator
Loren Fisher

Director, Extension Information Technology
Rhonda Conlon

Director, College Leadership Programs
Rhonda Sutton

Associate Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Director, NC State Extension
A. Richard Bonanno

Assistant Director, HR and Operational Strategy
Nikki Kurdys

Evaluation and Accountability Coordinator
Meredith Weinstein

Executive Director of Extension Foundations
Sterling Frierson

Interim Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Executive Director, Agricultural Program
John Dole

Director, Marketing and Communications
Justin Moore

USDA – National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Updated June 2022

N.C. Cooperative Extension. (2022). Retrieved from https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/nc-cooperative-extension-organizational-chart.

Simultaneously, Extension operates as a Professional Bureaucracy, working to help fulfill the land grant mission, through its role as the link between NC State University and North Carolina citizens. As such, there are many well-educated agents, program assistants, and specialists who operate with a generally high level of autonomy, charting their own course (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 83).

Because of this autonomy, programs can look very different from county to county. The 4-H program in Macon County often looks substantially different from what is offered by the 4-H program in Durham County. Additionally, there is a large focus on continuing education and professional training involved in Extension. As Bolman and Deal suggest in regards to pitfalls of Professional Bureaucracies, NC 4-H can be slow to respond to the external environment, and the organization can get lost in tradition. This will be discussed later in the analysis.

Within these structural configurations, both vertical and lateral coordination exist.

Vertically, the Dean of the College of Agriculture at NC State and other officials develop the strategic plan for the organization, and they develop rules and policies. These include Minors on Campus guidelines, background check requirements for volunteers, and other standard operating procedures. Additionally, these individuals outline how many continuing education requirements agents must have and ensure all of the minimum requirements for training have been met through evaluation and reporting systems. In this way, NC 4-H and Extension as a whole "coordinates and controls the work of subordinates through authority, rules and policies, and planning and control systems" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 58). This also informs the planning and decision-making efforts of the organization. If a program is not in line with the overall plan or falls outside of the organization's primary objectives, it will not be supported by NC 4-H. Additionally, this type of coordination informs what the priorities of the organization are, even if it is not the most beneficial way to distribute and collect information.

Lateral coordination is especially relevant on a county level and within program areas, involving formal and informal meetings, task forces, coordinating roles, and networks (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 61). Within many counties, employees participate in regular staff meetings, coordinate between program areas, and work with advisory committees and volunteers to meet county objectives.

Additionally, professionals work with other 4-H agents and specialists across the state to collaborate and share resources, which drives program success. Lateral coordination is highly beneficial for planning and program execution. It is often a key component for whether or not an event or program will occur and/or be successful.

Given these structural configurations, some dilemmas exist including excessive autonomy. Because agents have quite a bit of freedom in what they do at the county level, it can lead to people feeling isolated (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 78) and overwhelmed. Luckily in 4-H, professionals do have an organized association, which encourages collaboration. It operates separately from the NC 4-H organizational structure.

Besides excessive autonomy, overload is another structural dilemma, and it is one that likely leads most often to burnout and agent turnover in Extension, leading into a discussion of the next frame: human resources.

Human resources frame

4-H professionals are prone to being pulled in 100 different directions. Between meetings across the state, youth events like residential summer camp and club meetings, and other responsibilities, 4-H agents spend many hours working past regular business hours, on weekends and away from home. This leads to high rates of burnout and a push for more work-life balance. State 4-H leader, Mike Yoder recognizes this. As one way to combat this, he says he would like to see more consistent management among CED regarding managed scheduling. Managed scheduling allows 4-H professionals to take time off during normal business hours when they have worked programs during evenings and weekends, and this serves as a way to tip the metaphorical work-life scales back to a balance (2022, personal communication).

Another ongoing effort the state team is making includes updates to the standard 4-H youth development agent job description. Yoder says the new version is "a little more honest," especially regarding the frequency of weekend and evening program responsibilities (2022, personal communication).

When it comes to hiring, Extension's practices reflect two important aspects - being selective and finding a good fit for the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 122). As Collins states, "the more selective the process, the more attractive a position becomes…and the number one resource for a great social sector organization having enough of the right people willing to commit themselves to mission" (2005, p. 16). This suggests being selective in the hiring process and requiring a certain amount of rigor in light of the organization's mission to draw in the right candidates for the job can be a successful strategy. Additionally, as Bolman and Deal discuss, "A good fit benefits both (the

organization and the individual). Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed" (p. 122).

When applying to be an Extension agent, individuals must submit their application and resume, as standard for many jobs. If an individual makes it through the initial stage, they must then give a presentation to the county Extension staff, District Extension Director, and select community representatives, discussing their background and vision for their program area in the community. Extension and NC 4-H favor having at least three finalists. Finally, the candidate has an interview with the CED, District Director, and a few members of the staff. This process allows the entire staff to learn about the candidates and allows leadership to gauge whether or not the candidate is adequately equipped for a role, and the candidates to determine if they are willing to commit to the job. This process also provides insight into the candidates public speaking and interpersonal skills, which are two necessary skills for 4-H work.

Investment in NC 4-H's current human resources is critically important. Beyond effective management and hiring the right people for the job, it is important to provide continued training and support for employees. Extension offers a wide range of opportunities for employee training and education through virtual and in-person sessions; continuing education in the form of tuition waivers; and other opportunities throughout the state. While the cost of promoting this level of continued training and education is high, the result is more well-rounded employees who can better serve the citizens of North Carolina. Additionally, because mastery is a primary motivator (RSA, 2010) this investment encourages employees to expand their knowledge and should result in a more satisfied workforce.

Motivating and engaging employees is another key component to effective organizational management and leads to the satisfaction of employees and desired results for the organization. In addition to mastery, autonomy and purpose are two other primary motivators that impact behavior and productivity (RSA, 2010; Bocarro & Webb). Organizations can encourage employees in these three areas pretty easily by being flexible, listening to employees' feedback, and allowing for innovation.

By encouraging mastery, autonomy, and purpose, NC 4-H can engage and motivate high-quality staff despite the challenges found within the social sector.

Symbolic frame

Culture plays an important role within organizations (Bocarro & Webb). The 4-H culture is no exception. Extension and 4-H also have a culture of cooperation - no pun intended - and collaboration as agents, specialists, volunteers, and administrators work together to solve problems in meeting the needs of North Carolina residents.

One of the goals of Extension and NC 4-H is to provide a service that meets the needs of local communities. In order to be responsive to the community, professionals have to be in touch with what current issues and needs are present. This cultural characteristic was intentionally sown into the organization's processes, because NC 4-H relies on feedback from advisory committees and data from local communities when making programmatic decisions. NC 4-H tries to emphasize the value local volunteers add to 4-H and its members by honoring volunteers, holding appreciation events, handwritten thank you notes and birthday acknowledgments. Agents can periodically call volunteers, especially club leaders, to catch up on what is going on in their role and in their life.

Extension also has a culture of continuing education and achievement, with high priority placed on continuing education classes, attending workshops, as well as attending the three-day State Extension Conference each year. This is one of the ceremonies significant within Extension symbolism and culture (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 268).

Being tasked with carrying out the land-grant mission through youth development, NC 4-H educates externally and promotes education internally. There is a culture of life-long learning through the organization's mission, connection to NC State and other UNC system schools. Every employee is required to complete a graduate course every 5 years until they reach a certain

promotional status (Weinstein, 2022). Many agents take advantage of tuition waivers offered by their employer to earn credits and degrees over time.

Despite the positive cultural pieces of Extension and 4-H, there is also an underlying culture within the organization of inconsistency and confusion as policies are often changing, reporting systems adjusted, etc. Bolman and Deal discuss the complexities that can be involved with organizational culture. As an organization that has existed for over a century, 4-H is steeped with culture and tradition, and it can be very segmented among county programs due to a variety of factors such as tenure of staff members, volunteer attitudes, or established member expectations.

Sometimes changes to the symbolic frame are stoked by events taking place in the political arena, which is the fourth and final frame.

Political frame

From the political perspective, there are a number of entities influencing the operations of NC 4-H. These include North Carolina citizens, N.C. Cooperative Extension stakeholders and senior leadership, and county government, which pay a portion of county-based employees' salaries and influences county planning as it pertains to the organization. Extension as a whole operates in partnership with county governments, so employees within the county offices are accountable to both management at the state and county levels.

Because of the various political arms influencing the organization and levels of authority, it is necessary for 4-H professionals and other leaders to develop positive relationships to help move the mission forward. As Kotter suggests, "organizational excellence…demands a sophisticated type of social skill: a leadership skill that can mobilize people and accomplish important objectives despite dozens of obstacles; a skill that can pull people together for meaningful purposes despite the thousands of forces that pull us apart…" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 212).

In addition to forming these unique relationships in the various environments in which Extension operates, there are additional layers of authority within 4-H. As a federal institution, 4-H requires adherence to policies and reporting mechanisms apart from those standards throughout the rest of the N.C. Cooperative Extension system. For example, reporting is widely done in the Extension Reporting System, but 4-H professionals must also submit reports through the 4-H Online database due to its nature as a national organization. This can create confusion as the standards for 4-H and Extension are not always compatible with one another. Clear guidelines across the organization are crucial to the success of 4-H.

Organizational problems

Issue 1 analysis: communication gaps

Communication gaps exist internally and externally with NC 4-H stakeholders. Internally, communication around why change is happening, especially regarding policy changes outside of NC 4-H, could be improved. With many partnering agencies, like NC State University, NC A&T State University, National 4-H Council and others, it can be confusing to understand where policy change first occurred before it trickled down to NC 4-H and why it is occurring. This lack of communication causes confusion not only among professionals, but also volunteers and supporters of 4-H.

Externally, more often than in the past, people are learning about Extension and 4-H services through internet-based media. There are varying levels of quality with the information available online about local 4-H programs. This type of media is important when communicating the diversity of 4-H programs - both traditional and more modern - with external stakeholders. According to a Journal of Extension article from 2018, "The establishment of strategies and goals can help clarify Extension professionals' reasons for pursuing Internet-based media to grow their programs' (Whitaker, Leggette & Barbeau, 2018).

In one of the week 2 videos, Michael Kirschman talks about introducing change ahead of implementation as a communication strategy (2017). This is not always possible when policies are developed outside of your organization yet influence your organization. However, his advice would help CEDs and 4-H professionals better understand why change is being implemented and interpret how it will influence current processes.

Marcin Jakubiec of the Silesian University of Technology provides a variety of instructions for organizations and their internal communications. Two pieces of advice are particularly relevant to NC 4-H's operations.

1. "Prepare middle managers as messengers. Those who work most closely with teams will naturally be the most trusted sources of information," Jakubiec says. "It is essential, therefore, to equip managers with the knowledge they need and the tools and structures to communicate effectively with their team" (Jakubiec, 2019).

   With the organization's current structure, county Extension directors and area 4-H agents frequently serve as messengers between state-level leadership and 4-H professionals at the county level.

2. "Establish a consistent cadence in messages. Another way to break through information clutter is to establish a consistent way that information is presented. Setting patterns for information-sharing can help to keep messages clear and direct" (Jakubiec, 2019).

   Yoder says when he first started in his role, he strayed away from systematic email updates due to the volume of emails 4-H professionals were already receiving. Recently this has changed, and NC 4-H has started a monthly email campaign which is intended to communicate with professionals and individuals involved in organizations that support 4-H. This includes the NC 4-H Development Fund (Yoder, 2022, personal communication).

   "The role of internal communication is therefore not only to pass information, but also to build a system of values, creating ideology of changes which motivate and educate employees," Jakubiec says (2019).

   Bolman and Deal's discussion on mental models applies well to NC 4-H and its external communications (2021, p. 40-42). 4-H has many long-standing traditions, and this influences the perception of what it is both internally and externally. For example, it is common for new families inquiring about 4-H to be surprised about the diversity of programs. Many associate livestock and agriculture projects with the organization and know little else. Agriculture is an important industry in North Carolina, but there are many other areas of interest youth can explore through 4-H such as shooting

sports, electricity, photography and environmental science. Internally, there are unspoken pressures to maintain traditional programs. However, this focus can distract professionals from recruiting non-traditional volunteers with skills and knowledge to offer local youth, and NC 4-H misses opportunities to embrace new topics and technologies.

As an organization, NC 4-H also needs to approach its communication and marketing efforts more strategically. Is the organization promoting content on the platforms that youth are actually using, and if so, is it doing that in a responsible and consistent manner? In other words, is 4-H trying to recruit members on Facebook when youth are using Instagram and TikTok?

If the organization is not communicating with stakeholders where they are at, then it is missing key trends and pieces of information.

The solutions section will discuss how NC 4-H should respond to these communication gaps.

## Issue 2 analysis: responsiveness to the environment

Discussion of external communication gaps leads well into one of the most significant challenges facing 4-H: being responsive to the external environment. It appears when the organization - at a local or state level - operates more as a closed system than an open system. State 4-H Leader Yoder says it has hurt to not have a strategic plan for NC State's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences finalized, because N.C. Cooperative Extension and NC 4-H rely on its completion to cement their own strategic plans. He also commented on the importance of understanding NC 4-H's mission (Yoder, 2022, personal communication). "Our reality is we should be working with all youth," he says. "Not all youth have the same opportunities."

In the last 10 years, the scales have tipped from having a majority of people living in rural areas to people living in suburban and metropolitan areas. "NC's rural population remains significant, but most growth has occurred in or around larger cities, with more than half of 2010-19 growth occurring in just

six counties," reported North Carolina's Office of State Budget and Management in 2021. "Mecklenburg and Wake Counties alone accounted for 38%."

Not only is the population density landscape changing, but race and ethnicity trends are changing as well across the state as population grows. According to North Carolina's Office of State Budget and Management, "At least 38% of North Carolinians are Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, or multiracial. These race/ethnic groups have accounted for almost two-thirds of total population growth since 2010 and will account for approximately two of every three persons added between (2021) and 2030." In part this is due to a large migrant population in the state with growth of migrants occurring at an increasing rate (North Carolina's Office of State Budget and Management, 2021).

Population Estimates
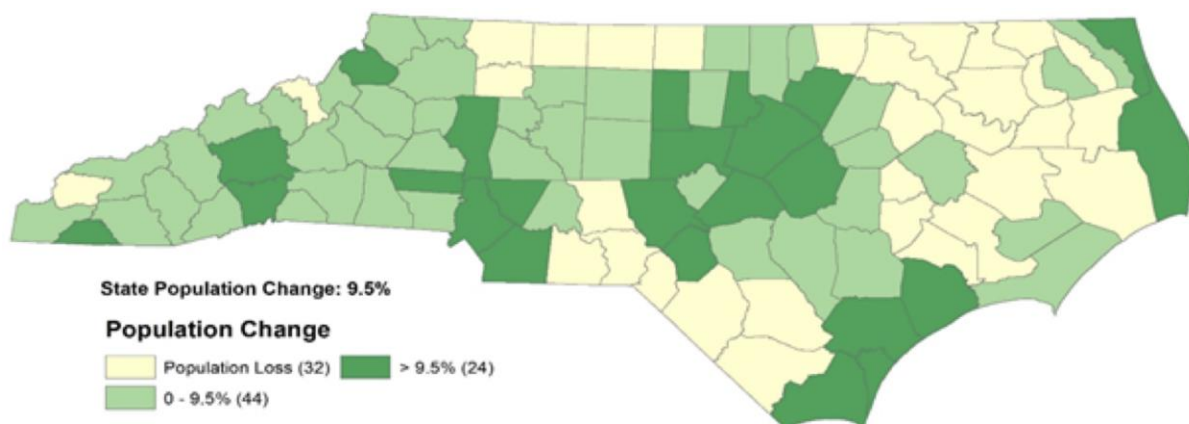
Data from NC OSBM Population Estimates, Vintage 2019. Retrieved October 5, 2022 from https://www.osbm.nc.gov/media/1866/open

Some societal issues that NC 4-H and 4-H at a national level are wrestling with from a political perspective include policies for lodging and travel with LGBTQ+ youth, and impacts of COVID-19 on mental health (Yoder, 2022, personal communication). State 4-H leaders from across the U.S. collaborate on programs and issues as the "4-H Program Leaders' Working Group." It is one group tasked with navigating these topics. Their work is focused on diversity, equity and inclusion best practices; advancing positive youth development research and its application; and strategic planning.

Another way COVID-19 has changed the environment is through shocks to the education system. "All the research is showing young people are behind (in school)," says Mitzi Downing, assistant state program leader for NC 4-H (personal communication, 2022). "We've been a really heavy school enrichment state for years," she added, but school enrichment programming has been trending down since the pandemic for a number of reasons. Downing cited new educational curriculum initiatives and school safety as two.

Other examples of the need for responsiveness within NC 4-H can be found at the county level. While it is important to value the opinions of volunteers and stakeholders, 4-H must embrace change (Bocarro, Kanters & Kirschman, 2018) and engage with the environment to avoid entropy (Bocarro, 2020).

For instance, Ashe County used to have a youth livestock show. As interest in livestock shows waned locally, the local 4-H program discontinued the show and started focusing on other programs where there was greater youth interest, but some of the adults involved with the show have been unhappy with its discontinuation.

Understanding the political environment can aid 4-H professionals in distinguishing what sacred cows exist in local communities and where there is opportunity for positive change.

All of these challenges related to being adaptable to the external social and educational climate can create issues within an organization, but they can also lead to organizational improvement if NC 4-H embraces opportunities to innovate, improve, and grow (Kouzes and Posner, p. 16). Operating as a more open system, being willing to take chances with innovative programs and considering multiple perspectives through community input are all key components of that.

Organizational solutions & prognosis

Solutions for communication gaps

Internal communication gaps

Communication gaps are primarily a structural and human resource issue. In conversation with Yoder and Bonanno, organizational leaders are aware this issue exists and have taken some steps to try to close the gap. One example is the creation of the area 4-H agent position.

In 2019, three new positions were established to help bridge the communication gaps between the state office and county 4-H agents. These new agents split the state in thirds, serving around 30 counties each and supporting 4-H professionals. They help communicate and clarify state-level updates and policy changes, helping agents put these into practice at the local level.

Area 4-H Agents meet with the state 4-H staff 1-2 times per month in person or via Zoom, allowing for more direct and open communication between the counties and the state office. Another advantage to these positions is that they were hired internally from a pool of long-term county agents, "(fostering) trust and capitalizing on knowledge and skills of veteran employees" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 147). Indeed, these Area 4-H Agents have a combined 60-plus years of experience at the county level. This allows them to advocate for county agents by being well aware of challenges faced at the local level, while also being closely connected to the state office. This provides more streamlined communication.

Now that these Area 4-H Agent positions are more well-established, it is time to better utilize them to further close communication gaps. We propose these agents host quarterly in-person meetings and work sessions across their district which would allow 4-H Agents to come together to ask questions, get assistance in real-time, receive updates from the state office, and collaborate to achieve organizational goals. This would foster collaboration horizontally between agents and would help bring state level updates to county 4-H agents and troubleshoot any issues county agents may have in implementing these guidelines.

Additionally, these Area 4-H Agents should be involved in the training of CEDs in 4-H protocols. Within Extension, 4-H Agents are held to more extensive guidelines due to the nature of working with youth and the implications with minors on campus compliance. However, CEDs, who are usually direct supervisors to 4-H professionals, are not trained on 4-H protocols or their implications on the county program.

As Travis Birdsell, CED in Ashe County, explained, "CEDs attend three two-day training sessions as a part of the onboarding process covering topics related to (human resources) and managing the county office. However, none of that involves guidance on 4-H protocols" (personal communication, 2022). So, we propose Area Agents help train new CEDs on 4-H policies and procedures and host a quarterly Zoom update for CEDs regarding 4-H guidance. Since 4-H agents are primarily autonomous and at times operating in a silo within the counties, requiring an initial training and subsequent quarterly updates would encourage agents to seek guidance and provide another layer of accountability.

Dr. Bonanno commented in an interview that "maybe email isn't enough" for communicating internal updates to CEDs about 4-H policy changes, so being strategic in utilizing these area Agents and training CEDs properly will help streamline communication from upper management to county 4-H agents (personal communication, 2022).

This leads to an important solution for bridging communication gaps. **NC 4-H needs to better prepare CEDs to be "trusted sources of information" because they have a responsibility to be a middle manager for 4-H professionals who are carrying out programs subject to minors compliance policies (Jakubiec, 2019)**. They need enough of a working knowledge about 4-H policies to catch errors and relay communication they receive from the state level.

External communication gaps

External communication with NC 4-H's current and potential clientele is another issue that should be improved. We propose a focus on branding in the organization by investing in a media and

marketing specialist at the state 4-H office. This person would be tasked with developing a strategic marketing plan for NC 4-H, detailing how state and county efforts can be more aligned and helping to manage public relations. Currently, there is no strategic marketing plan for NC 4-H, and there is no one in the state office who focuses on marketing as part of their primary job responsibilities. The addition of such a position would help create a more cohesive image of NC 4-H and streamline the organization's messaging by communicating with clearer and more consistent messaging. As noted earlier, the 4-H program can vary from county to county. Therefore, clear messaging about NC 4-H's priorities and mission is necessary. This position should also specialize in responding to stakeholder questions.

In addition, county professionals should receive support with these external communications efforts in conjunction with strategic statewide marketing efforts. This could be implemented during the onboarding because time and resources are already being spent on that process already. Adding a component geared toward training 4-H agents in marketing their county programs and equipping them with tools to develop a localized marketing plan, including tools for how to update and maintain web based resources, would benefit local county 4-H programs while staying on brand with NC 4-H.

This person should be well-versed in incorporating new platforms and technologies to reach the organization's target audience and improve external communications as well. According to a 2022 Pew Research survey, "Some 67% of teens say they ever use TikTok, with 16% of all teens saying they use it almost constantly. Meanwhile, the share of teens who say they use Facebook, a dominant social media platform among

Since 2014-15, TikTok has arisen; Facebook usage has dropped; Instagram, Snapchat have grown

% of U.S. teens who say they ever use any of the following apps or sites
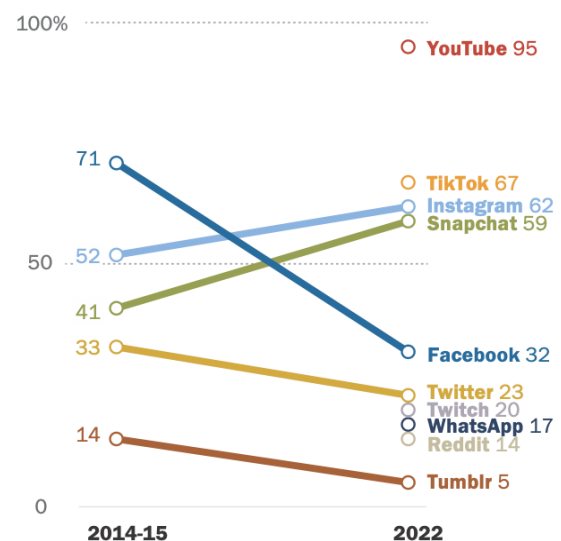
Note: Teens refer to those ages 13 to 17. Those who did not give an answer are not shown. The 2014-15 survey did not ask about YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitch and Reddit. TikTok debuted globally in 2018.
Source: Survey conducted April 14-May 4, 2022.
"Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

teens in the Center's 2014-15 survey, has plummeted from 71% then to 32% today. Teens ages 13-17 are using TikTok as a top social media platform while only 32% of teens are using Facebook today as opposed to the 71% of teens using Facebook in 2014" (Pew Research Center, 2022).

Because of this, North Carolina 4-H should embrace new technologies and social media platforms as a means of communication with our consumers in order to remain relevant and ensure 4-H's continued success.

Solutions for responsiveness to the environment

Tradition versus innovation

The first solution for Issue 2 is to emphasize the importance of adaptability within programs to meet current youth needs. NC 4-H should strive to strike a balance between the deep-seated traditions that any century-old organization has, including NC 4-H, and the innovative "Think and Do" attitude of one of its parent organizations - NC State. This issue is a cultural or symbolic issue with some influence from the political frame, so it requires a tactful approach when initiating progress.

"Tradition is important if not equally as important as flexibility," Bonanno says, speaking to how 4-H carries out its mission in North Carolina (personal communication, 2022). **Primarily we suggest 4-H professionals analyze how they can implement Kouzes and Posner's practice of "(Enlisting) others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations"** (2017, p. 24). This might look like partnering with school systems to provide education about mental health and build community in the aftermath of COVID-19, or it could involve partnering with a local institution of higher education to provide access to information about careers in high-demand fields. Another example of adaptability in response to environment change would be utilizing advisory committees to analyze how local programs are serving LGBTQ+ youth.

County-based professionals must be keenly aware of local needs. "You've got to have a finger on the pulse of that county," Bonanno says. "That's why advisory committees are so important, and that's

the beauty about it. You can do just about anything depending on the people you serve" (2022, personal communication). As described in the analysis above, the North Carolina population continues to shift more toward suburban and urban areas. 4-H professionals serving different types of populations need to know what programs will serve their populations best.

Old-school programs such as livestock, sewing and food preservation will likely be more applicable for rural audiences than they would be in urban counties. However, traditional programs can be adapted. For example, youth in Wake and Mecklenburg counties could benefit from veterinary science programs as an alternative to a more traditional 4-H livestock program. Area agents and 4-H professionals from similar counties can collaborate to implement new, more customized programs.

"(Conflict) is the root of personal and social change, creativity, and innovation," Bolman and Deal say. "(It) encourages new ideas and approaches to problems, stimulating innovation" (2021, p. 204). NC 4-H has an opportunity to turn the tension between innovation and tradition into something good.

Culturally-aware programs

As net migration is to account for 84% of population growth from 2020-2030, culturally-aware programs are desperately needed (North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2021, p. 3). As NC 4-H works to be more responsive to the external environment, **better investment in the Juntos program and other culturally-aware programs as well as training for professionals is critically important, as migrant populations across the state grow.**

Juntos, meaning "together" in Spanish, is a program that helps "Latino students achieve high school graduation and attend higher education," according to its mission statement (NC State Juntos, 2022). North Carolinians were trailblazers for 4-H when Juntos began in 2007, and since that time other states have implemented Juntos programs. In 2021, there were 15 school programs in North Carolina (NC State Juntos, 2022).

More schools and counties need Juntos, and the community college system is an avenue for expansion. Other states have proven it can work well, and North Carolina has not thoroughly explored this option. During an interview for the *Connect Extension Podcast*, a non-profit organization which supports Cooperative Extension nationally, North Carolina's Diana Urieta said, "We are learning from each other, and we're really seeing, 'How do we do this work better?' as we hear from other states and the successes they're having" (Connect Extension Podcast, 2021). Urieta is the senior director and co-developer of Juntos North Carolina.

Coordinator for the Juntos program in Oregon, the second state to adopt the model, said, "My greatest hope for this effort is that we're able to empower the students and families to advocate for themselves and that they're able to navigate educational systems." She added, "The Juntos program is an investment. It's an investment in terms of time, in terms of resources and this needs to be a priority."

Besides Juntos, there are other ways NC 4-H can do what Kouzes and Posner call "Challenge the Process," by approaching 4-H programs in a way that embraces new ways of nurturing youth and their cultural backgrounds (2017, p. 24). Providing 4-H professionals with training on how to work with migrant populations, facilitating cultural exchanges and incentivizing participation in language programs are all examples of human resource development and building NC 4-H's capacity to serve culturally-diverse populations.

The future of North Carolina 4-H

Looking to the future, Yoder says one clear opportunity is further volunteer development. This helps NC 4-H grow its capacity to serve youth and families statewide. Also from the human resource and structural perspective, Yoder says he would like to see 4-H professionals have a stronger mentor program and enact a policy for new professionals, where they do not participate in programming for their first month. "As an Extension organization, we're trying to enhance the onboarding process and the continuing education process," he says (personal communication, 2022).

As an educational organization, NC 4-H should show concern for the long-term effects of COVID-19 disruptions in learning and support youth in their efforts to achieve academic success. A study from the University of Virginia looked at scores from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening or PALS, which is taken by Kindergarten through second-grade students across the state "to evaluate students' risk for reading difficulties" (2022, p.1). When comparing fall 2019 and fall 2020 scores to fall 2021 scores it found, "data across demographic subgroups highlights disproportionately higher rates of below-benchmark scores among students who are Black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, English learners, and those with disabilities. This takeaway is supported by the overrepresentation of these students identified as at high risk when compared to both overall rates and their relative proportion of the total student population" (University of Virginia, 2022, p. 4) Although education systems vary state to state, NC 4-H professionals' observations align with findings saying kids need help catching up to standard benchmarks for learning.

There are some strong aspects of the NC 4-H organization that Yoder would like to see maintained moving forward. First, he says having specialists in most departments of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at NC State "lends credibility to 4-H and lends credibility to specialists" (personal communication, 2022). Secondly, it benefits NC 4-H to have at least one professional per county. Not all states have this type of staffing model.

From the symbolic frame, NC 4-H should focus on increasing brand visibility throughout the next 3-5 years with a focus on creating meaningful connections with NC Cooperative Extension and positive associations with the 4-H clover. For those already familiar with 4-H, the clover is synonymous with positive childhood experiences, impactful opportunities, and fun while learning. However, this symbol is less known to people with no 4-H background. As Dr. Bonanno said in an interview, "4-H doesn't have the same level of popularity as similar organizations like FFA with their blue corduroy jackets." So focusing on the brand image of 4-H and increasing 4-H's familiarity in communities across the state is crucial.

NC 4-H must continue to be innovative in its approach to reach new audiences and respond to changing environments. It must remain relevant as a trusted source for positive youth development in North Carolina for today's youth and future generations.

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