

IDEA SHEET  
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

**FALL YOUTH FORUM:  
A MODEL FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRAINING**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Leadership = Skills development + opportunity to share skills

This Idea Sheet describes Juneau County's Fall Youth Forum (FYF), and proposes it as a model for counties' consideration and adaptation. The FYF replicates a professional development conference with a general session, breakout seminars, and time for social networking. Since first initiating the FYF in 2005, it has transitioned from a way to teach club officer skills and multi-cultural awareness lessons, into a broader conduit for youth and adults to teach and learn skills about everything from animal health to origami.

In the past, University of Wisconsin-Extension Youth Development staff prepared 4-H members to assume leadership and life skills using an array of teaching techniques and delivery models. These educational opportunities for youth and volunteers are frequently planned and led by 4-H Agents, Academic Staff, or Educators during evening and/or weekend hours. Economic challenges within households as well as those of counties and the University must be considered whenever implementing plans. It is imperative to streamline meeting times, transportation costs, and have Youth Development staff work more efficiently for the benefit of stakeholders.

### **Goals of the Fall Youth Forum:**

1. Consolidate multiple workshops into a one-day, multi-faceted learning experience for 4-H members, parents, and volunteers.
2. Maximize parent and member time and transportation.
3. Reduce expenses to volunteer, parents, and the county Extension office.
4. Increase opportunities for youth to take leadership roles (planning, coordinating, and teaching).
5. Increase opportunities for youth and adult leaders to form partnerships in planning and presenting material at the club, community, and regional levels.

### **Situation Statement:**

Youth Development Staff traditionally offer leadership education throughout the 4-H year including club officer training/parliamentary procedure, community club and adult volunteer orientation. These educational opportunities often took place on separate night or weekend meetings. In Juneau County, only modest numbers of youth attended workshops like club officer training. The challenge was how to accomplish the training and develop an appealing format that would invite youth, parents, and volunteers to attend. The capacity-building training would then allow them to take what they learned and apply it to club, county, and regional 4-H programming. The idea of offering a variety of subject matter to a wider audience in a single-day, single location began to unfold into the present Fall Youth Forum.

### **Methods: Setting/Location**

Criterion for implementing the Fall Youth Forum required classroom and large group activity space and accessibility to all participants. The Juneau County Fall Youth Forum is at a public school where small groups meet in classrooms, while two multi-purpose rooms (gymnasiums) offer space for large group activities. Use of this facility is free.

**Format:**

The overview of the Fall Youth Forum includes a general session, small group sessions, healthy snack, and a multi-cultural awareness session for everyone. In the afternoon there are additional concurrent sessions, followed by a group finale and evaluation between 9 am and 3:30 pm. There are several large group opportunities for all participants to be together for learning and then several opportunities for individual learning choices, where members work in small groups.

**Morning Session:**

The day's agenda is similar to that of a professional conference. The event opens with the American Pledge of Allegiance and the 4-H Pledge, followed by a general session with parents, club organizational leaders, volunteers, and 4-H members. The general session keynote speaker introduces the event's theme and conducts a brief icebreaking activity. Small group workshops (breakout sessions) that follow the general assembly include Club Officer training, a Cloverbud session, youth leadership workshop, and an adult leaders seminar. *Note:* Club Officer training is an extended morning session that encompasses all but the time set aside for the multi-cultural session.

The Executive Board of the Leaders Association teaches club officers their respective duties (e.g. President of Association teaches all club Presidents, etc.). Reflection and application time is set aside for youth to practice newly acquired officer leadership skills. A 4-H club and the Youth Ambassadors lead the Cloverbud session (art project, games). Youth, with support from adult partners, teach two additional concurrent sessions (subject matter reflects annual theme) for members not involved in either club officer training or the Cloverbud Session. Workshops are 45 minutes, with youth rotating between sessions. Attendees enjoy a healthy mid-morning snack. All participants attend a multi-cultural awareness seminar to conclude the morning session. The multi-cultural clinic includes presentations by families that participated in the international

exchange program, or hosted an international traveler. This provides an opportunity to share diversity of foods, customs, and family life.

**Afternoon Session:**

The lunch break is 30 minutes followed by indoor or outdoor games, depending on weather, led by the current year's Camp Counselors. The exercise invigorates youth and provides preparation time for volunteers to set up the afternoon Project Fair. Tables contain project materials and curriculum guides, demonstration booths, and make-and-take activities. Staff provides posters covering the following topics: 4-H trips, camp, after school programming, club location and contact information to encourage enrollment in 4-H, and the steps required for starting a new club. When set up, the Project Fair resembles the vendors' hall of a professional development conference, showcasing 4-H projects.

The Project Fair is open to the public, advertised through public service announcements on the radio and in local newspapers. Participants have 90 minutes to circulate through the tables, complete activities, learn about projects, and meet members and leaders. Youth or adult volunteers staff each poster site to engage visitors and get them involved in the make-and-take activities. Youth Development Staff remains on-site throughout the conference.

**Finale:**

The final event of the FYF is installation of both the Leaders Association Executive Board and 4-H community club officers. Youth Development Staff first installs the Executive Board's President, after which each Executive Officer installs his/her like youth officers (e.g. President of Leaders Association installs all 4-H community club Presidents, etc.). This does not preclude clubs from conducting their own formal installation ceremonies. Public installation of officers also provides 4-H adult and youth leaders the recognition of peers from throughout the county. 4-H club general/organizational leaders, youth leaders, and project volunteers are

introduced and recognized by the audience for their participation. Youth, parents, and volunteers annually complete written evaluation on the process, format, and content of the day. The data has provided valuable feedback for the Agent and Planning Committee to continue this learning day. The FYF concludes with cleanup, a closing activity selected by youth leaders, and the retreat of the colors.

### **Results and Evidence:**

In completing the annual evaluation form at the conclusion of each FYF, participant suggestions have included: the selection of a yearly theme, with workshops to be based on the theme, the value of individual choice sessions to learners, the capability of presenters, and feedback on the overall format of the day. As a result of the first evaluation, the 4-H Youth Ambassadors now select the theme six months prior to the date and then inform the adult Leaders Association. Youth leaders partner with the Association, meeting monthly to develop workshop content.

Since 2006, the 4-H Leaders Association financially supports the-now-annual event. Evaluations have also stated that parents and leaders appreciate the one-day program covering multiple topics, while respecting parent's time and the Leaders Association costs.

The amount of contact time between youth and adult project volunteers has increased 58% from 2005 to 2008. Youth/adult partnerships increased by 68% through the seven new project committees formed. Data demonstrates increased youth leadership roles in the 4-H Ambassadors, as well as in club and community activities. Youth vie for workshop space on the FYF agenda. 4-H club officer training remains a primary focus of the morning session and is much better attended through the Fall Youth Forum. Since 2005, 51 club officers have been trained. FYF content varies annually related to new project opportunities, theme, and ideas proposed by youth. The FYF is a work in progress with improvements from evaluations presenters and organizers, and as such, is fluid in its presentation.

**Implications:**

The format of the FYF allows opportunities for present and future communication, training, and leadership capacity-building in a one-stop shop. For example, the University of Wisconsin's state 4-H office is initiating annual volunteer training. The Fall Youth Forum format provides the flexibility to offer a parallel track for this newly required volunteer training. In 2007, FYF offered 4-H volunteer training, called the Fall Volunteer Forum (FVF). Adult volunteers participated in round-table sessions, first to meet each other, and then to plan project activities in each of the central project areas: Animal Science, Cultural Arts, Home-Health-Family, Physical Science, Plant Science, and Science-Engineering-Technology (SET). Positive contact between youth and adults during well-planned and executed project activities like these provides potential for youth leadership. The Fall Volunteer Forum gets volunteers representing multiple disciplines in the same room at the same time to receive 4-H updates.

The Fall Youth Forum relieved University of Wisconsin's 4-H Youth Development Staff of sole responsibility for planning and conducting multiple evening and weekend meetings. Consolidation of meetings maximizes attendance and time, minimizes costs, increases opportunities for improving 4-H youth and adult leadership skills, and provides the building blocks for youth/adult partnerships. Improvements could include providing a multi-cultural activity along with the presentation, and assuring that more youth and adult members develop project booths for the Project Fair. The flexible format of the FYF and the FVF meets the educational needs of youth and adult leaders. It is an effective and efficient use of resources in an all encompassing format that has handled past, and will handle future training needs while providing an excellent opportunity for youth and adult leadership and partnership in Juneau County.