

An Analysis of the Motivational Needs of Volunteerism Among Virginia Adult 4-H Volunteers

¹Tonya T. Price, Ph.D.

¹(State 4-H Office, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, Virginia Tech, USA)

Abstract: *Understanding volunteer motivation has been recognized by researchers and administrators as a valuable component of program development. Thus, it is important to explore the motivational needs that contribute to Virginia adult 4-H volunteerism. This quantitative research study was designed to fill a gap in the current volunteer literature regarding our understanding of the motivational needs of Virginia adult 4-H volunteers. Data were collected from 296 Virginia 4-H volunteers via a 20-item questionnaire utilizing McClelland's Trichotomy of Needs Theory. The results showed that the top three motives for volunteering with Virginia 4-H were within the achievement and power subscales. Further, a significant positive relationship was revealed between motivational needs (achievement, affiliation, and power) and satisfaction level. Results also indicated no significant differences between the motivational needs of urban and rural Virginia 4-H volunteers and 4-H involvement was the most prevalent youth experience that influenced the decision to volunteer for 4-H.*

Keywords: *4-H, Motivation, Volunteerism*

I. Introduction

The 4-H program is one of the major program areas of the Cooperative Extension Service, and, as a non-formal youth educational program, relies on volunteers for its success. Of the 13,378 Virginia adult 4-H volunteers participating in 2008, it is estimated that they donated a monetary value of \$1.8 million through in-kind contributions by volunteering their time, talent, and effort to further the goals of the Extension organization (Virginia 4-H ES237 Report, 2008). In order to recruit and work with volunteers, we must first understand their motivations. Understanding what motivates volunteers is an important element in understanding how best to work with them.

Due to the large number of non-profit organizations, the Virginia 4-H program faces great competition for volunteers. Thus, it is necessary to obtain more knowledge about what motivates these people to give freely of their time and efforts. Insufficient knowledge regarding Virginia adult 4-H volunteers' motivational needs may create serious problems that may negatively influence the development of the 4-H program and the efficacy of the work by 4-H agents and specialists. As a direct result of this lack of knowledge, the Virginia 4-H program could have difficulty retaining its adult volunteers. Thus, knowing and understanding Virginia adult 4-H volunteers' motivational needs will assist 4-H agents and specialists in making future decisions regarding recruiting, motivating, training, and retaining vital adult 4-H volunteers.

II. Theoretical Framework

In formulation of a theoretical perspective for studying volunteer motivation, McClelland's Trichotomy of Needs provides a useful prototype. McCurley and Lynch (1996) stated that a person volunteers for an organization because there is something to gain from being involved. Volunteers have needs, and in some way their needs are being met through voluntary involvement. Understanding these needs provides insight as to what motivates volunteers. McClelland (1961) theorized that individuals of all cultures are motivated by one of three needs: achievement, power, or affiliation. Although all of us possess all three needs, we possess them in varying degrees.

The researcher chose to use McClelland as the theoretical framework for this study because it provides a comparable basis as to whether Virginia adult 4-H volunteers are motivated by similar needs as 4-H volunteers in other states. Additionally, McClelland's theory can be applied in various settings and provides measurable indicators of motivation (affiliation, achievement, and power). This allowed the researcher flexibility in categorizing 4-H volunteer motivational needs into these three subscales, regardless of voluntary involvement. Unlike other content theories, McClelland assumed that the basic needs of an individual have been met when the decision is made to volunteer, therefore, focusing on higher level needs (affiliation, achievement, and power).

Overall, the researcher chose McClelland's theory as the theoretical framework for this study because it is arguably the most effective of all motivation theories in analyzing and explaining adult 4-H volunteers' preferred source of motivation. This content theory is the best fit for determining why volunteers are motivated to volunteer for Virginia 4-H. Moreover, this theory works well in studying 4-H volunteers as it is able to

identify individual rewards based on motivational needs and links those rewards to volunteer roles for motivational acceleration. Perhaps the most prolific strength of McClelland's theory is its ability to pinpoint motivational needs of volunteers which are learned through coping with one's environment. Together, all of these reasons justify and explain the researcher's choice of McClelland's Trichotomy of Needs as the theoretical framework for this study.

III. Purpose and Research Questions

The rising need for volunteerism within the Virginia 4-H program has created a compelling reason to review and re-evaluate existing research regarding 4-H volunteerism. Understanding what motivates individuals to volunteer their time and expertise to Virginia 4-H is critical. This information could provide agents, specialists, and others working with these volunteers the knowledge to design recruitment, training, and programming efforts in a way appealing persuasively to the needs of potential volunteers.

Research concerning Virginia 4-H volunteer motivation is restricted, and all studies measuring 4-H volunteer motivation have originated from outside the commonwealth. To extend the knowledge base of 4-H volunteer motivation in Virginia and to better serve the number of 4-H volunteers throughout the commonwealth, additional research is needed.

Given the important role volunteers play in implementing Virginia 4-H programming and the demographic makeup of the 4-H program, it is pertinent to understand more about the motivations involved in adults becoming Virginia 4-H volunteers. Thus, the purpose of this study is to ascertain the relative strength of motivational needs of Virginia adult 4-H volunteers using McClelland's Trichotomy of Needs Theory, the influence of youth experiences on their volunteer efforts, and the relationship between motivational needs (affiliation, achievement, and power) and the self-reported satisfaction level as identified by a sample of 4-H volunteers involved in the Virginia 4-H program.

IV. Methodology

In an effort to understand the motivational needs and motivational level among Virginia 4-H volunteers, a survey was sent to adults registered as 4-H volunteers during the 2008 4-H year (October 1, 2007 – September 30, 2008). The Virginia 4-H enrollment data consists of individual names and contact information for 6,068 adult volunteers. A base sample size of 362 returned and completed surveys was determined to be necessary for this population. Taking into consideration the possibility of non-respondents, the sample size was increased to 600 based on a 60% return rate assumption and a proportional stratified distribution of surveys to each of the six districts.

Using enrollment data maintained by the Virginia 4-H Program, registered volunteers were sorted into their respective district using the 4-H Plus data management program. The survey for this study was designed to collect data on volunteer motivational needs in an effort to understand Virginia adult 4-H volunteer motivations. Motivation was measured using 27 statements developed by Henderson (1981) and based on McClelland's Trichotomy of Needs Theory (1961).

V. Results

These results were gathered from 296 usable surveys mailed back to the researcher by participants in the target population, constituting a 55% return rate. What are the motivations of Virginia adult 4-H volunteers and how are these volunteers distributed in terms of their primary motivational need (power, achievement, or affiliation)? To determine what motivated these volunteers, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement for each of the 27 reasons they may volunteer their time and services to Virginia 4-H. Volunteers were asked to respond on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree. Not applicable responses were coded as missing data. Frequency distributions were obtained for each of the questions regarding motivations.

Two motivational statements tied for the highest mean score (3.35), "I am a 4-H volunteer because I want to teach and lead others," and "I volunteer in 4-H because it is a way to improve my community." The statement, "I volunteer because I want to have influence on how young people learn and grow" was the third highest mean score (3.33). The first two of these statements were items within the power and achievement subscales, respectively, and the third was an item within the power subscale.

The three lowest mean scores, all in the power subscale, were "I am a 4-H volunteer because I like to receive recognition for being a volunteer" (1.91), "I receive status in my community because I am a 4-H volunteer" (2.22), and "I volunteer in 4-H because I like to be responsible for 4-H programs" (2.57).

Regarding the distribution of Virginia adult 4-H volunteers and their primary motivational need, results indicate that they are motivated by achievement (3.06), closely followed by affiliation (3.04) and then power (2.78). Open-ended responses to question 14, other motivators that are important when volunteering time to 4-H, were analyzed for similarities. The top three additional motivators that were identified were: helping youth

develop life skills and making a positive difference in their lives, supporting Virginia Cooperative Extension to ensure the continuation of Virginia 4-H, and serving as a positive role model for youth.

VI. Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The researcher concluded and previous research supported the notion that respondents of this study were motivated to serve by reasons that are cause based (Culp, 1997; Henderson; Rouse & Clawson, 1992). Causes identified in this study were teaching, leading, improving and influencing others. Thus, in order for Extension to attract and retain volunteers it will need to consider these motives in all volunteer tasks and activities. Literature states that volunteering for a cause that one is interested in provides satisfaction in knowing that they are making a difference in the lives of others and within the organization they are contributing their time (Rouse & Clawson).

The results of this study provided some implications as to how Virginia 4-H and Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) can better work with volunteers while raising awareness and providing guidance for increasing and sustaining volunteerism. In order to successfully recruit and retain Virginia 4-H volunteers, Extension professionals should focus on providing a variety of volunteer opportunities that appeal to achievement, affiliation, and power motivations. By providing tasks that allow for innovation and accomplishment, Virginia 4-H and/or VCE can meet personal needs, the needs of youth, the organization, and the community. If volunteer organizations are failing in fulfilling volunteer motives, then the volunteers may choose to discontinue their service. Thus, a great deal of thought should be put into the programs and volunteer tasks Virginia 4-H offers.

Finally, on a broader scale, further research should explore the differences in motivation among personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, length of service), the factors influencing their decision to volunteer (e.g., religion, employment), and the factors influencing their decision to stop volunteering. Understanding the underlying motivational drives of those who volunteer is a complex and difficult question, yet understanding these motivations can be of great assistance to non-profit organizations in attracting, placing, and retaining volunteers.

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