Removing Barriers for Volunteers

Before looking for volunteers, look at your program. The pressure of, and your enthusiasm for volunteer recruitment can blind you to barriers which may discourage or even prohibit participation. Open your eyes for a serious look at your program.

The University of Wisconsin 4-H faculty developed the excellent guide, "Barrier Removal." This section is excerpted from that publication, as a reminder to make total program accessibility a top priority.

Start by Identifying Barriers

Barriers can be real or imaginary. When we identify the barriers that keep adult volunteers and young people from participating, we can start doing something to lower those mountains. Our challenge is to lower the barriers after we identify them. Not all barriers can be removed some must be acknowledged, dealt with, or even circumvented.

Using the 5 P's to Look at Barriers

The 5 P's of marketing: place, product, promotion, price and people, apply to our barrier identification and removal process. For each category, list specific situations in your program which could be possible barriers.

Bringing varied, individual, experiences together into a review committee.

Place
Are our places of meetings and get-togethers accessible?
Are they suitable for people with special needs to gain access?
Comfortable?
Well-equipped?
Safe?
Are there barriers that we could remove in our place?

Product
Do we offer variety in programs, projects and activities that spark interest?
Do we have unreasonable or impractical policies...such as allowing enrollment only in the fall?
Do we offer programs that perpetuate sex stereotyping, such as clothing strictly for girls and woodworking strictly for boys?
Are there barriers we could remove in our product?

Promotion
Do we have a marketing plan for our program?
Do people know how to contact the local groups?
Are leaders visible within the community?
Do we make ourselves known on a regular basis?
Are there barriers we could remove in our promotion to involve under-represented populations?

Price
How much time are we requiring from members or other volunteers?
At what cost?
What resources are we requiring, demanding, using?
What price policies have we set? Do they impede participation?
Are there barriers we could remove in price?

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People   How many leaders and parents are involved?

Do we have adequate numbers?

What about the quality of the involvement?

Are they receiving enough training?

Do we welcome people regardless of race, creed, gender or ability?

Are there barriers we could remove for greater participation?

Involving People to Identify Barriers

Each of us has a perspective on our organization that is related to our experience. Where we live, the 4-H people we interact with, our previous experiences with groups and education, our age are among the things that influence our current perspective and should help in our effort to identify barriers and work to reduce them. The Expansion & Review Committee should include representatives from the geographical region (urban and rural), varied age groups, diverse skills and program interests and racial and ethnic representatives. The mix of people adds depth and breadth to perspectives in identifying people, program policy and other marketing needs. It is also helpful to seek involvement of non-participants for the Expansion & Review Committee.

A Few Tips

The following tips to remove barriers came from volunteers in Wisconsin's Central District and from the Wisconsin 4-H Marketing Plan:

1. Only offer quality programs.
2. Use term "volunteers," not "leaders", so the idea of being "an expert" doesn't scare away volunteers.
3. Make 4-H easier to find in the phone book.
4. Give print materials an up-to-date look with modern artwork, pictures, typestyles.
5. Clean up county 4-H welcome signs.
6. Be more flexible on enrollment policies. Let youth and adults get involved at any time of the year.
7. Make meetings more accessible; make meetings count!
8. Welcome visitors. Treat them kindly.
9. Use 4-H and Extension logos constantly and consistently.

As you review these suggestions to removing barriers, start thinking of some additional ones you may use in your county. How else is 4-H perhaps unknowingly blocking participation? Don't forget that our ultimate goal in barrier removal is to stress the benefits and cut the costs.

Think of two ways you can help clubs and other groups lower barriers to participation.

1. _____
_____
_____
_____

2. _____
_____
_____
_____

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Methods to Remove Barriers

When the barriers have been identified, there are several methods to use in planning to attack these problems. One method is brainstorming, followed by nominal group techniques.

Another useful approach is "Force Field Analysis," a method of identifying driving forces and restraining forces as they relate to a particular objective, goal, problem or need. In Force Field Analysis you: define the problem or barrier to involvement; define the driving forces which suggest the need for change; define the restraining forces which resist change; work on strategies for both driving and restraining forces. The following example shows a barrier to participation, the driving forces which increase the need for change, and the restraining forces which support the status quo with resistance to change.

Problem: The Program's October enrollment policy restricts membership.

Strategy	Driving Force	Restraining	Strategy
Create a Welcome Brochure	New families move in throughout the year	Office needs mailing lists	Use computer to update lists monthly
Design Membership options	Some want seasonal participation	Clubs need to get organized to plan year	Plan program without new people

For each driving force and restraining force, a suggestion (or strategy) is shown which will lessen or eliminate the problem. This process is useful in strategizing forces affecting goal accomplishment and need fulfillment.

Apply "Force Field Analysis" to a problem your local program faces.

1. What is a major need, goal or objective? _____
   _____

2. What is a major problem (or barrier to involvement) related to this need, goal or objective? _____
   _____

3. What are the driving forces suggesting a need for change? _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. What are the restraining forces which resist change? _____
   _____
   _____

5. What can we do to improve our situation for each driving force? _____
   _____
   _____

How can we improve our situation for each restraining force? _____
   _____
   _____

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