
Importance of Effective Communication

Communication is a process by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create shared understanding. Communication requires that both the sender and the receiver be actively involved in a communication system. In other words, county Extension agents must clearly articulate their messages. However, it is just as important that the listener hear the message. Use several methods and strategies for conveying messages.

Communication is a critical component of leadership and management. Failure to communicate causes many organizational problems. County Extension agents must share information with members and families involved in 4-H Family and Consumer Sciences projects.

Listed below are communication venues that will help in managing 4-H projects.

Packets/letters: Give the 4-H'ers involved in competitive events a packet/letter with pertinent information about rules, schedules, and entry information. District contest packets are available on the district 4-H website. Modify these for use as county competition packets. Individuals who qualify for state contests need to know that state contest packets are available on the 4-H website. There is also a checklist in the project information section.

Newsletter: Include all important dates and deadlines in the monthly 4-H newsletter. Highlight and boldface important information (especially dates) so that it is more noticeable. Repeat the important items.

Some county Extension agents have a short announcement within the newsletter and a list of important dates and deadlines on the last page. Also consider including a monthly 4-H calendar in the newsletter.

Email listserve: To inform and remind parents and families of rules, guidelines, and upcoming activities, develop an email listserve for these individuals. This is a great way to provide “real time” information to the appropriate audience. Emails can be extracted from 4-H CONNECT.

Website/blogs: Keep the information current and relevant. Explore the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to keep 4-H members and volunteers informed and updated.

Local family and consumer science teachers: Many 4-H members are also members of Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA). When appropriate, ask local FCS teachers to share information with students in their classes. This is especially important when announcing project workshops, trainings, and county achievement events.

Club managers and project leaders: The club manager is the information conduit to many 4-H members and families. Always keep club managers informed, especially before an upcoming club meeting.

Because county Extension agents rarely attend every club meeting, keeping club managers informed is a must. A good way to do this is by distributing a one-page document of program highlights. Ask the club managers to deliver the information at club meetings.

Summary

No single communication strategy works best all of the time: The key is to use several methods to ensure that everyone receives all the information they need.

Also remember that repetition is good. Repeating information several times increases the chance that everyone who needs it will receive it.