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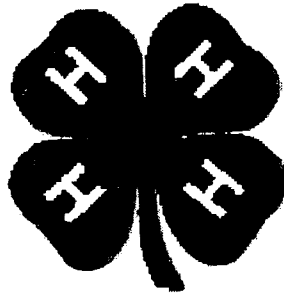
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ABSTRACT

Evaluation was part of the planning process for a Western 4-H Institute, an intensive, multi-state training for relatively new extension staff with 4-H responsibilities. Training content was diverse, but it focused on enhancing agents' professionalism and strengthening the 4-H club program. The evaluation measured training impacts on participants and assessed job satisfaction, career goals, retention, turnover, and promotion in extension ranks. The first evaluation instrument was given at the beginning of training on April 15, 2002; the second at the end of the Institute on April 18, 2002. The 75 training participants were from every Western state except Hawaii and Oregon; 69 completed both evaluation instruments. Findings indicated that participants were predominantly female, married, childless, and young; were most likely to have held teaching or education positions before taking an extension job; felt moderately strongly about making extension their lifelong career; were most likely to be full-time 4-H agents; were most likely to have attended 2-4 training workshops in the past year; moderately strongly expressed job satisfaction; were very likely to report that the training enhanced their skill to work in 4-H, increased their competence, and increased their self-confidence in managing a 4-H program; and were most likely to report that the training had significantly improved their skills in all 15 core competencies measured. (YLB)



Western 4-H Institute: Preparing the 4-H Professional for Success Evaluation Report I

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July 2002

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the summer of 2000, the Western states 4-H program leaders were approached with a proposal to undertake an initiative to strengthen 4-H clubs in the region. Their support was immediate and enthusiastic. Following this meeting, a regional task force was created to explore ideas for strengthening the 4-H club program. A number of county agents and specialists served on this initial steering committee--

- Kirk A. Astroth, MT–Chair
- Lisa Lauxman, AZ
- Darlene Dickson, NM
- Sue Hoffman, NV
- Jim Lindstrom, WA
- John Borba, OR
- Rose Saito, HI

Out of their deliberations, six ideas emerged for strengthening the 4-H club program (see page 4). One of these ideas was to conduct an intensive new agent training in the Western Region. To carry out this effort, a task force was appointed to develop a curriculum and host the training. The task force began meeting by phone in early 2001, planning to host the training institute in the spring of 2002. The following individuals comprised this task force:

- Darlene Dickson, NM–Chair
- Tara Andrews, MT
- Roni Baker, MT
- Roxie Dinstel, AK
- Linda Webb, ID
- Jim Lindstrom, WA
- Deryl Waldren, CO
- Gerald Olson, AZ
- Sarah Chvilicek, NV
- Ross Jacobson, UT
- Kevin Kessler, UT
- Kirk A. Astroth, MT

The author wishes to thank and acknowledge each of the members of this task group, without whom the Institute would not have been possible. Each person contributed in unique ways to the development of this four-day training event for new 4-H staff from all over the region. Without their hard work, there would have been no Institute and thus no evaluation. This evaluation report is as much their work as the Institute. Their role in all aspects of the Institute, including this evaluation report, needs to be acknowledged and celebrated.

Executive Summary

Participants in the Western 4-H Institute...

- were predominately female, married, child-less and young. Most lived in larger cities or in rural, non-farm areas.
- were most likely to have earned either a bachelor's or master's degree in animal science, education, agriculture or communications.
- were most likely to have held teaching or education positions before taking an Extension job.
- were most likely to have less than 3 years of experience on the job.
- felt moderately strong about making Extension their lifelong career.
- were most likely to be full-time 4-H agents, but one-fourth were program assistants or aides.
- most likely work more than 50 hours per week, although 15 percent work more than 60 hours per week.
- were likely to have taken 1-2 days of annual leave in the previous 3 months, but nearly 20 percent had taken no leave time at all.
- were most likely to have attended 2-4 training workshops in the past year.
- were likely to be members of the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA), but half were also likely to hold a professional membership in another Extension-related association.
- over two-thirds had never attended the annual NAE4-HA conference.
- were moderately strong in expressing satisfaction with their job.
- were very likely to report that the Institute training had enhanced their skills to work in 4-H, increased their competence as well as increased their self-confidence to manage a 4-H program.
- were most likely to report that the Institute training had significantly improved their skills in all 15 core competencies measured during the Institute, especially in having a common understanding of positive youth development and in articulating and applying "best practices" in youth development.
- were likely to have read at least 2 work-related books in the last 12 months, and were likely to subscribe to at least one professional journal.
- were not likely to have received an award or other citations for their Extension work but were still likely to report that they felt validated by others for their work and received positive feedback about their work.

Background

Among the various delivery methods used by 4-H, and other youth development organizations, the "club" or "group" method is regarded as the most valuable and effective. Engaging youth in a closely knit group that meets in an educational setting with caring adult volunteers, sustained on a regular/recurring basis over time, has been shown to have the greatest positive and permanent influence on the development of critical life skills among young people. The eight critical elements of effective or vibrant youth groups further illustrate the importance of quality club experiences in the lives of young people.

In 4-H, the club approach has its roots in rural areas and small communities, where it remains stronger than in more urban settings. Even so, club numbers have dropped, perhaps partly due to the migration of populations out of rural areas, competition of time and other opportunities which are now available for youth. While 4-H clubs have been formed in medium-sized and larger cities and in suburban areas, the greatest growth in 4-H has been with other, less intense delivery methods. Generally, these youth do not see themselves as "4-H members". The total 4-H enrollment in clubs has dropped and the average age of club members is also dropping.

The traditional 4-H club structure may also be less successful in meeting the needs of today's teenagers. Teenagers who left 4-H said they left primarily because they were not given responsibility commensurate with their skills and interest to lead the program. At the same time, youth who have a sustained experience in a community youth development club/organization with volunteers who understand youth must be full partners and assume the leadership have substantially better odds of making a successful passage through adolescence to a productive and contributing adulthood.

In April of 1995, the National 4-H Strategic Directions Team suggested the need to "rethink the club model for today's world". Several key thoughts emerged from their discussions including:

- ▶ neighborhood clubs are important vehicles in community building and in sustaining positive youth development.
- ▶ club volunteers are used as communication vehicles but not always as strengthening partners, with paid staff holding too much of the leadership role at a time when fewer paid staff are available due to shrinking public funding.
- ▶ clubs need tools/techniques and ideas but not hand holding
- ▶ there is a need to redefine the roles of youth and adults in 4-H and other community youth development clubs
- ▶ a "how to start a 4-H club" kit is needed for the diverse volunteer in today's 4-H. Many of these volunteers have no background or experience in 4-H.
- ▶ clubs are important tools in maintaining the beliefs and attitudes necessary to maintain a democracy.
- ▶ club administration needs to be compatible to a wide array of geographic, economic and cultural settings.

The importance of the 4-H club program was re-affirmed in the new **National 4-H Strategic Plan** (October 2001). Under the theme of "**Extraordinary Places to Learn**," Goal #5 stipulates that "4-H will maximize the effectiveness of our delivery modes." (P. 12) The first two recommendations make it clear that 4-H clubs remain a critical and defining element of Extension's youth development mission:

Recommendation: Enhance offerings of 4-H clubs, which offer long-term, sustainable opportunities for youth under the direction of a caring adult in community-based settings.

Recommendation: Promote and sustain 4-H clubs that vary in size and scope, from one-on-one interaction to complex and innovative systems that connect people and bridge emotional, physical and geographic boundaries."

In addition to this need to strengthen the 4-H club model, there has also been a movement to bolster the 4-H youth development profession. A number of organizations, particularly the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA), have directed resources and attention in order to enhance the youth development profession. In 2000, the association even went so far as to create a new leadership structure with a Vice-President for Professional Development to give increased emphasis to this area. Training the youth development professional in the practical elements of youth development has been an area of increased emphasis. Even the final report of the National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century called for increased training for youth development professionals.

Need for Training

Because many Western states are small in terms of staff numbers, we sometimes do not give new 4-H faculty enough training or early enough in their careers to succeed with the 4-H club program. 4-H clubs are the core of Extension's youth development mission. Yet, this is the part of their work that will often "make or break" new agents. Knowing how to work with volunteers, deal with 4-H leader's councils, recruit and train new club leaders, and other aspects of the 4-H program are critical to a new agent's success.

In 1998, the Western region recognized an opportunity to form a multi-state collaboration to address the issue of "strengthening the neighborhood/community 4-H club". The club program remains a vital part of most of our states' youth development work which makes it, perhaps, more important to this part of the nation. In November 1999, state 4-H program leaders in the West approved a proposed initiative to strengthen 4-H clubs.

Six specific goals were proposed by a multiple-state steering committee:

- 1) A regional training institute for new faculty with any 4-H responsibilities.
- 2) Establish a new award in NAE4-HA for excellence in 4-H club support. (Implemented in 2000).
- 3) Master 4-H Volunteer Curriculum (under discussion)
- 4) Master's degree in Youth Development (Great Plains IDEA)
- 5) Survey of 4-H professionals—what it takes to be successful.
- 6) More pro-active advocacy with upper administration for 4-H professionals and what they do.

The Western 4-H Institute grew out of the first priority. The explicit goal was to strengthen the 4-H club program by providing an intensive, multi-state training for relatively new Extension staff with 4-H responsibilities. The content of the Institute training was diverse but everything focused on enhancing the professionalism of agents and strengthening the 4-H club program. The complete curriculum for the Institute is available on CD-ROM by contacting Jim Lindstrom, Spokane County (WA) Extension Agent.

Evaluation Design

As a part of the planning process for the Institute, evaluation was considered from the beginning. We wanted to be able to measure not only the impacts of the training on participants, but we also wanted to follow up with participants some months after the Institute to see if these impacts had lasting value. Consequently, each participant's evaluation was coded to their individual name for ease of follow-up.

Another aspect of the evaluation design was to assess job satisfaction, career goals, retention, turnover and promotion issues in Extension ranks. There is currently very little data available on turnover rates in Extension 4-H positions. While NAE4-HA attempted to conduct a member assessment two years ago, the return rate was too low to make the results generalizable to a larger population. Through this training conference, we hoped to move toward a greater understanding of job satisfaction, numbers of hours worked per week, retention, and career aspirations.

The following report summarizes the results of two evaluation instruments that were given to Institute participants. The first instrument (Evaluation 1) was given at the beginning of the training on April 15, 2002, while the second (Evaluation 2) was given at the end of the Institute on April 18, 2002. While a few questions were repeated on both instruments, most were unique and designed to collect some baseline data. (Samples of both evaluation instruments are attached in the Appendix). Our hope is to administer a third evaluation tool in another 12-14 months to assess longer-term impacts from the training.

Every Western state except Hawaii and Oregon sent participants to the Institute.¹ Nearly 90 individuals participated in the Institute, but 12 of these were training staff. Others were only observers, speakers or part-time participants. In the end, 75 people were full-time training participants. Of these, a total of 69 completed both evaluation instruments (a return rate of 92%). This report summarizes the key findings from these paired evaluations.

Finally, a great thanks to the staff in the Montana State University College of Nursing's Center for Research and Creativity for coding, entering and analyzing the data. Their partnership is greatly appreciated.

¹Not all participants were from the Western region. Five individuals worked at National 4-H Council, and one individual was a new 4-H specialist from Maryland. The results from these six individuals are included in the totals.

Evaluation 1

Part 1--Demographics

Gender. Of those participating in the Institute, females comprised 68.1 percent (n=47) of the audience while males comprised 31.9 percent (n=22).

Age. The average age of the Institute participants was 35.5 years, but the range of ages were 23 to 61 years of age. The largest cohort in the Institute was the 28 years olds who comprised 12.3 percent of the total.

Marital Status. The following table illustrates the marital status of participants:

Table 1. Marital Status

Status	Percent	Number
Single	24.6	17
Married	62.3	43
Separate	1.4	1
Divorced	2.9	2
Committed Relationship	8.7	6

Children. The following table indicates how many children participants reported having.

Table 2. Number of children, by percent of total..

Number of Children	Percent of Total Participants
0	50.7
1	7.5
2	28.4
3	7.5
4	3.0
5	3.0

Residence. The following table indicates the primary residence of the participants.

Table 3. Residence of participants, by percent of the total.

Residence	Percent
Rural farm	13.2
Rural, non-farm	17.6
Small town (0-4,999)	13.2
Small town (5000-9,999)	8.8
City (10,000-49,000)	16.2
City (50,000 - 99,999)	8.8
Large city (100,000+)	22.1

Educational Background. The following table indicates the highest educational level attained by Institute participants.

Table 4. Highest educational degree attained, by percent of total.

Highest Degree	Percent
High School Diploma or Equivalent	7.2
Associates Degree	4.3
Bachelor's Degree	43.5
Master's Degree	43.5
Doctorate	1.4

Areas of Study. As a part of the evaluation, we asked about the major and minor areas of study for college degrees. There were a wide variety of areas identified, but the following tables indicate the most frequent areas of study.

Table 5. Major undergraduate areas of study, by percent of total.

Undergraduate Major	Percent
Animal science	17.7
Communications	8.1
Elementary education	8.1

Agricultural education	8.1
Education	4.8
Family & Consumer Sciences	3.2
Biology	3.2
Agricultural Economics	3.2
Economics	3.2
Agricultural Business	3.2

Table 6. Graduate Majors, by percent of those with graduate degrees.

Graduate Major	Percent
Extension Education	15.6
Agricultural Technology	9.4
Family & Consumer Science	9.4
Agricultural Education	6.3

Part 2-Professional Experience.

The second part of the first evaluation attempted to gather information about the participants' professional training and experience. The following information summarizes the major findings.

Other Types of Professional Employment. The most common previous professional position held by Institute participants was in teaching or education.

Table 7. Previous professional positions held by Institute participants, percent of total.

Type of Position	Percent
Teaching/Education	44.7
Extension-related	9.0
Sales	9.0
Agriculture	3.6

Years with Extension. Since the Institute was designed to attract relatively new employees with Extension, we asked participants how many years they had been with Extension.

The average length of time participants had been with Extension was 3.1 years, with the median being 2.5 years. Interestingly, about 30 percent had been with Extension for only one year while nearly 15 percent had been with Extension 7 years or more. The following table shows the range of experience with Extension.

Table 8. Number of years with Extension, by percent of total.

Number of Years with Extension	Percent
0	8.6
1	30.3
2	10.1
3	15.9
4	8.7
5	5.8
6	5.8
7	2.9
8	4.3
9	4.3
10	2.9

Likely to Make Extension a Lifelong Career. As a part of the evaluation effort, we asked participants to rank on a scale of 1 (not likely) to 10 (very likely) how likely they were to make Extension their lifelong career. We asked this question twice—once at the beginning of the training and once again at the end. Although there was no significant difference in the average ranking for the total group, there was a slight increase reported. **The average ranking on Evaluation 1 was 7.01; the average ranking on Evaluation 2 was 7.41.**

Position Currently Held. Of the participants, nearly half (49.3 percent) were county Extension agents or educators. Of the remainder, 18 percent were various kinds of program assistants, coordinators, agent assistants or other paraprofessional. In addition, 7.5 percent were National 4-H Council staff and 4.5 percent were FCS agents.

Percent of Position Dedicated to 4-H. As a gauge of the kinds of positions these participants held, we asked what percent of their job was defined as 4-H work. Of the participants, 52 percent were 100% 4-H while the average was 80 percent 4-H responsibilities.

The range of 4-H responsibilities in their jobs ranged from 25 percent up to 100 percent.

Hours Worked Last Week. We often hear how many hours per week Extension 4-H agents have to work and how this leads to burnout and turnover, so we asked about work loads. This question specifically asked, "Think back to just last week. How many hours did you work last week?" The average number of hours worked was 50; however, 23.1 percent reported working 60 hours or more in the previous week.

Hours Worked in the Last 3 Months. So that the responses to the previous question did not represent some unusual aberration, we also asked about the average number of hours per week each person had worked in the past three months. The table below summarizes the results.

Table 9. Average number of hours worked in the last 3 months, as a percent of the total.

Average hours per week worked	Percent
40	13.6
45	18.2
50	19.7
55	6.1
60	12.1
70	3.0

Interestingly, 42.4 percent reported working more than 50 hours a week over the past 3 months. Fifteen percent reported working, on average, more than 60 hours per week.

Leave Taken. We also asked participants how many days of annual leave they had taken in the last 3 months. The table below summarizes the results.

Table 10. Number of leave days taken in the last 3 months, as a percent of the total.

Number of Days Annual Leave Taken	Percent
Zero	18.2
1 day	25.7

2 days	16.7
3 days	7.6
4 days	4.5
5 days	13.6

Number of Training Workshops Attended. In order to assess how much professional development these participants were already getting, we asked them to tell us how many training workshops they had attended in the past 12 months. Here are the results:

Table 11. Number of Training Events Attended in the Past 12 months, as a percent of the total.

Number of Training Events Attended	Percent
0-1	4.4
2-4	54.4
5-7	26.5
8-10	8.8
More than 10	5.9

Member of NAE4-HA. One question asked participants if they were members of the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents. About three-fourths (75.4 percent) said they were members while 24.6 percent said they were not—but many of these said they planned to join after this training.

Number of NAE4-HA Conferences Attended. Participants were asked about the number of NAE4-HA national meetings they had attended in the last five years. Surprisingly, over two-thirds had not attended any NAE4-HA conferences in this time. The results below summarize their responses.

Number of NAE4-HA Conferences Attended in the last 5 years	Percent
0	65.2

1	20.3
2	13.0
3 or more	1.4

Other Association Memberships. We also asked to what other associations they belonged. The table below summarizes our findings.

Table 12. Membership in Other Associations, as a percent of 37 participants.

Other Association Memberships	Percent
NACAA	24.3
ESP	8.1
NEAFCS	8.1
AAFCS	5.4
NEA	5.4

Job Satisfaction. Finally, one question asked participants to indicate their current level of job satisfaction on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). The average ranking was 7.29, indicating a relatively high level of job satisfaction. We also asked this very same question on Evaluation 2, but there was only a slight, and non-significant, increase in reported job satisfaction as a result of the training Institute. Participants overall ranked their job satisfaction at 7.36 on this second instrument.

Evaluation 2

On the second evaluation given at the end of the Institute, we asked specific questions about the usefulness of the institute and changes in skill levels taken from the NAE4-HA Taxonomy of the 4-H Professional Research and Knowledge Base (since re-named the NAE4-HA Core Competencies for 4-H Youth Development Professionals).

Impact of the Institute Training.

Enhanced Skills. One of the first questions asked to what extent, as a result of the Institute, participants felt they had enhanced their skills to work in 4-H. The mean ranking was

7.68 on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high).

Competence. Another question asked participants to assess to what degree they felt more competent now to direct and manage their 4-H program. The average ranking was 7.25.

Self-Confidence. A third question asked participants to assess the extent to which their participation in the Institute helped improve their self-confidence to deal with their county 4-H program. The average ranking reported by participants was 7.48.

Core Competencies.

A number of questions were included that dealt deliberately with some of the core competencies identified as important for well-rounded youth development professionals. We employed the "pre-then-post" method of assessing the impact of the Institute on these core competencies. A paired t-test was used to compare means and test for significance. A seven point Likert scale was used to measure changes in skill levels, with 1 = low and 7 = high.

In this part of the evaluation, we asked about 15 core competencies. Participants reported gains in all 15 areas, and all the changes were significantly different. The following table summarizes the results from these questions.

Table 13. Changes in Core Competencies, by means, before the Institute and after.

Competencies	Before	After
Understand the ages and stages of youth development	4.72	5.63
Understand adult leadership styles	4.76	5.90
Ability to articulate "best practices" principles from a youth development approach	3.79	5.59
Ability to apply "best practices" principles to program design	3.68	5.51
Ability to effectively manage volunteers	4.26	5.59
Understand different models of youth development	4.03	5.49
Ability to work with youth as resources	4.61	5.84

Understand issues of diversity in my work.	4.99	5.83
Ability to establish priorities in relation to organizational mission	4.43	5.33
Understand the concept of positive youth development	4.55	6.12
Belief in the potential and empowerment of all youth	5.57	6.32
Ability to evaluate self and seek feedback from colleagues	4.38	5.49
Ability to articulate a person "vision" of youth development work	4.41	5.60
Ability to work with advisories and community boards or councils	4.42	5.62
Ability to thrive in Extension 4-H work	4.55	5.65

Interestingly, the greatest reported changes in skills were in articulating and applying "best practices" for youth development and in understanding the concept of positive youth development. Both of these were key components of the training because agents often express confusion about these two areas.

Personal Experiences.

The final section of Evaluation 2 explored some of the personal experiences of the participants as they related to their work.

Professional or Work-Related Books Read in Last 12 months. Participants reported that they had read, on average, over 4 professional books in the past year. The most common number of books read was two. Unfortunately, nearly one-fifth (19.4 percent) reported that they had not read any such books in the last year.

Subscription to Professional Journals. Another question asked to what number of professional journals or magazines they subscribed. The average number was less than 2 (1.97) while the median was 2. Again, about one-fourth (25.4 percent) indicated that they subscribed to

no professional journals or magazines (but then about this same number were not members of the national 4-H professional association).

Awards and Recognition. A fifth (21.7 percent) of the participants reported receiving at least one award during the past 12 months for their work in Extension. The other side of this, of course, is that nearly 80 percent had not received any recognition during the previous year for their work in Extension.

Related to this, the final question on Evaluation 2 asked participants to indicate on a Likert-type scale if people let them know how "well" they do at their job. We purposely left this fairly vague in terms of who gives this kind of feedback—supervisors, volunteers, co-workers, other administrators. We simply wanted to measure participants' perceptions of receiving positive feedback about their job performance. The scale we used was 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Three was neutral.

The average score for the group was 3.87 with 4.0 as the median. The following table summarizes the responses.

Table 14. Participants' perceptions of positive feedback, as a percent of the total.

Ranking	Percent
Strongly Disagree	2.9
Disagree	8.8
Neutral	10.3
Agree	54.4
Strongly Agree	23.5

As these results indicate, participants, in general, feel validated for their work and receive positive feedback. However, about 11 percent of those disagreed and did not feel that they received positive comments about their work performance.

SUMMARY

This report provides the first summary of evaluation data collected from 69 participants at the Western 4-H Institute held in April 2002 at the campus of Utah State University. The report provides a snapshot of information about relatively new Extension staff in the Western region and strongly supports the value of training new agents within the first several years of their employment. Through such training, we can enhance the skills of the youth development professional and strengthen 4-H club program management.

The Institute also accomplished something that many in-state training events are not able to accomplish—cross-state dialogue and learning. One of the benefits of conducting a regional training of this nature was to create peer communication and networks among new Extension

staff that would not happen in traditional in-state training programs. All participants in the Institute are linked via a "chat room" where information and inquiries can be shared without intrusion by administrators or supervisors.

Next Steps

By nearly every account, the Western 4-H Institute was a resounding success and received high compliments from the participants. Many indicated that this was "the best training I have ever attended" (see the qualitative evaluation results collected by Roxie Dinstel).

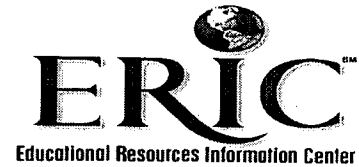
After the conclusion of this first-ever regional training institute, a number of inquiries were received about replicating this model in other regions. Task force members were asked if they'd be willing to take this training "on the road." In addition, requests surfaced almost immediately about repeating the Institute in another 2-3 years in the Western region.

Members of the planning committee talked by conference call about a month after the Institute and discussed next steps. All of us believe in the value of the Institute and feel that it should be replicated again in the region. We do not believe that one national institute would meet the needs of professionals nor provide a conducive environment for participatory training. Moreover, each region is so different that the curriculum for institutes in other regions probably needs to be crafted by those in the region (as we did).

The Institute should continue to focus on 4-H specifically rather than the youth development field in general. However, some of the content should be modified or changed, and other topics should be included for the future—such as program evaluation. Another planning committee may want to change the format, duration and/or start and end times. However, all of us felt the training was valuable enough that it should be repeated again with another new crop of 4-H professionals. We encourage the Western state 4-H program leaders to support continuing this training as a viable and valuable method for improving 4-H youth development in Extension.



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>tab called "Technical Assistance." There's a wealth of info from the
>existing sites, notes from their conference calls, various papers which
>outline the current work of the projects, and indications of the challenges
>they are facing in accomplishing their goals. I found it most helpful and
>think I would ask everyone on the advisory to look at certain key
documents.
>You might want to take a look.

>

><http://www.levitan.org/ydpa/TechAssistance.htm>

>

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>Actively defining the theory and practice of youth development.

>-----

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