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## 4-H Youth Development Programming in Indigenous Communities: A Critical Review of Cooperative Extension Literature

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### **Cover Page Footnote**

We would like to thank our corresponding authors Gloria Blumanhourst and Trent Teegerstrom. Their careful edits and critique were essential in producing this article.

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# 4-H Youth Development Programming in Indigenous Communities: A Critical Review of Cooperative Extension Literature

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**Abstract.** A literature review was conducted using the key words relating to Native American Youth and 4-H to assess the current state of 4-H youth programming serving First Nation/ Indigenous populations to inform future Extension initiatives. A systematic and qualitative review determined what level of focus the conducted programming efforts placed on broadly accepted elements of cultural identity as noted in the Peoplehood Model. A very small number of articles (N=13) were found pertaining to 4-H and Indigenous Communities. Fewer demonstrated emphasis on the peoplehood elements of language, place, traditional ceremony or calendars, and history. This work investigates a continuing inequity in 4-H PYD—both in service and reporting—and suggests some next steps for creating a more inclusive 4-H program for Native American/First Nation/Indigenous youth.

## INTRODUCTION

By any metric, Indigenous youths are profoundly underserved in the United States. There are 573 federally recognized First Nations, populated by more than 2.9 million citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Approximately 32% are under 18 years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Yet Native youths generally represent a small percentage of 4-H club communities. For example, in Arizona, the 2019–2020 4-H year saw 151 youths self-identify as American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), 3.21% of club membership (4HOnline, 2020). By comparison, the 2018–2019 Arizona Department of Education Indian Education Report noted 55,572 Indigenous youths—5% of the student body—enrolled in Bureau of Indian Education and Arizona schools in grades 3–12 (Arizona Department of Education Accountability & Research Division and the Office of Indian Education, 2019). In an effort to address this inequity, we have three main goals for this paper: (1) Determine the existing body of Extension literature detailing 4-H programmatic interactions with AI/AN communities through a systematic review; (2) critique these publications in terms of their inclusivity of First Nations peoples, using American Indian Studies (AIS) intellectual frameworks; and (3) recommend next steps toward a cohesive and culturally relevant framework for 4-H program design, assessment, and adaptation.

Evidence of successful 4-H programming initiatives with First Nations populations is sparse (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2015). This is a publication—or

dissemination—issue and an institutional culture problem (Fields, 2020). Our critical review is focused on academic products—i.e., published articles. We recognize that, as with the literature, 4-H youth development professionals have underreported programmatic efforts. Positive and negative outcomes from these efforts must be shared to improve the efficacy of positive youth development (PYD). Extension professionals must create overt systems of feedback whereby we can learn and adapt to better serve Native groups. As marginalization of AI/AN communities was a systemic and intentional process (Feagin, 2013), so must be our response (Fields & Nathaniel, 2015).

## NOMENCLATURE

A continual critique of language best practices must exist. “American Indian” and “Native American” are two of the most common names used to characterize Indigenous peoples throughout the United States (Yellow Bird, 1999). The U.S. Department of Agriculture and other federal agencies use the standardized language “American Indian/Native Alaskans (AI/NA)” (USDA, n.d.). The 4-H Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee (AEBC) American Indian/Alaska Native Champion Group recognizes the following terms to describe the Indigenous peoples of the United States: Native Americans, American Indians, Indigenous Americans, Alaska Natives/Native Alaskans, and, ideally, specific tribal names (4-H Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee, 2020). Yellow Bird argues that the diversity of culture and history in AI/AN groups is best described through the nomenclatures

of “Indigenous peoples” or “First Nations peoples.” The term “First Nations” promotes a recognition of inclusiveness, sovereignty, accuracy, and identity empowerment sought by Indigenous peoples of North America (Yellow Bird, 1999). While all the aforementioned terms are in general and professional usage, in this paper, we use the terms suggested by Yellow Bird (1999) and the AEBC and combinations therein that promote Indigenous sovereignty. In practice, this is complicated; it is important for Extension professionals to determine how the community they work in self-identifies—to insiders and to outsiders—and use language specific to that context.

## BACKGROUND

Engagement in high-quality 4-H programming increases a child’s ability to “thrive” (Arnold, 2018; Arnold & Gagnon, 2021). Thriving youths achieve important developmental outcomes—i.e., academic motivation and achievement, social competence, personal standards, connection with others, personal responsibility, and contribution to others (Arnold, 2018).

Many frameworks are used within the field of PYD. Foundational models include the 5 C’s (R. M. Lerner et al., 2003), Four Essential Elements (Brendtro et al., 1991; Kress, 2003), Eight Features of Positive Developmental Settings (Larson et al., 2004), Youth Program Quality Pyramid (Herman & Blyth, 2016), and the 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold, 2018). These frameworks emphasize social, physical, and emotional well-being as essential for positive outcomes. Elements common to all include belonging, supportive relationships, skill building and mastering, and safe environments. Integrating these elements into programming creates an environment capable of fostering PYD (Arnold & Gagnon, 2019).

Interestingly, some of the core methodology within 4-H PYD was derived from interpretations of Indigenous philosophy and adapted for 4-H (Kress, 2003). Generally attributed to Kress (2004), the Four Essential Elements (Belonging, Independence, Generosity, and Mastery, or BIGM) are directly taken from the much earlier model known as the Circle of Courage (Brendtro et al., 1991, cited verbatim in Kress, 2003). Here is an example (with the exception of “Indigenous”) of language from this article that is now considered fundamental within 4-H: “In traditional [Indigenous] society, it was the duty of all adults to serve as teachers for younger persons. . . . [C]hildren were nurtured within a larger circle of significant others. From the earliest days of life, the child experienced a network of caring adults” (Brendtro et al., 1991, p. 6). Brendtro et al.’s early text relied heavily on Indigenous sources, ethnology, and anthropology. Kress’s (2003) transfer has significantly affected the trajectory of 4-H club work by emphasizing PYD principles. Subsequent

references to BIGM in the field of PYD are typically made without mention of its relationship to Indigenous philosophy.

## RECOGNIZING UNDERSERVED AUDIENCES

The 2014 National 4-H Leadership Meeting highlighted steps for developing programs with First Nations populations. Samuel and Hughes (2014) have suggested

- establishing cooperation and trust,
- identifying common challenges faced by underserved audiences,
- identifying best practices in reaching individuals,
- identifying/using technology available to locate/serve populations with special needs,
- evaluating 4-H program delivery methods,
- exploring new models and reevaluating club models, and
- identifying ways to provide underserved populations with opportunities to thrive in 4-H.

A variety of pathways lead toward meeting the needs of underserved communities. Hiring and training a diverse group of 4-H professionals with the skills and desire to work with all youths is essential (Ewert & Rice, 1994; LaVergne, 2015a). Diversity within the volunteer base helps support diversity of youth experience. This directive is not simple—the recruitment and volunteerism dialogue needs to adapt and change with each individual or group. For example, National 4-H Council has published online resources for recruiting and supporting Latinx volunteers to grow 4-H programs and better serve Latinx youths (Erbstein et al., 2017; Vega et al., 2016). The two most promising suggestions are avoiding the word “volunteer” during recruitment—instead using “help” or “helping”—and asking volunteers for short-term commitments as opposed to the long-term commitments that 4-H clubs usually seek (Hobbs, 2018). Such tool kits are essential resources for 4-H professionals and have great potential for adaptation and use with Indigenous communities.

Best practices and tool kits have not been established for Indigenous communities. However, some progress has been made—the 4-H AEBC American Indian/Alaska Native Champion Group is forming best practices for working with Native youths (4-H Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee, 2020). These suggestions inform a wide variety of efforts and are therefore quite general. As of now, the suggestions include the following:

- Respect and learn from community elders, for elder knowledge is essential.
- Adapt efforts to collectivist culture.

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- Demonstrate reliability as a resource—people need to know that you are there to stay and will follow through.
- Recognize and respect the worth of everyone and everything.
- Express humility and recognize personal ignorance.
- Listen before talking.

Caring youth-adult relationships are improved by individuals who understand the traditions, values, and beliefs of First Nations peoples. It is critical that competencies of non-Indigenous adults working with AI/AN youths grow to accommodate these populations. Inclusive thriving outcomes can only be achieved with representation (Samuel & Hughes, 2014) across the 4-H organization (Fields, 2020).

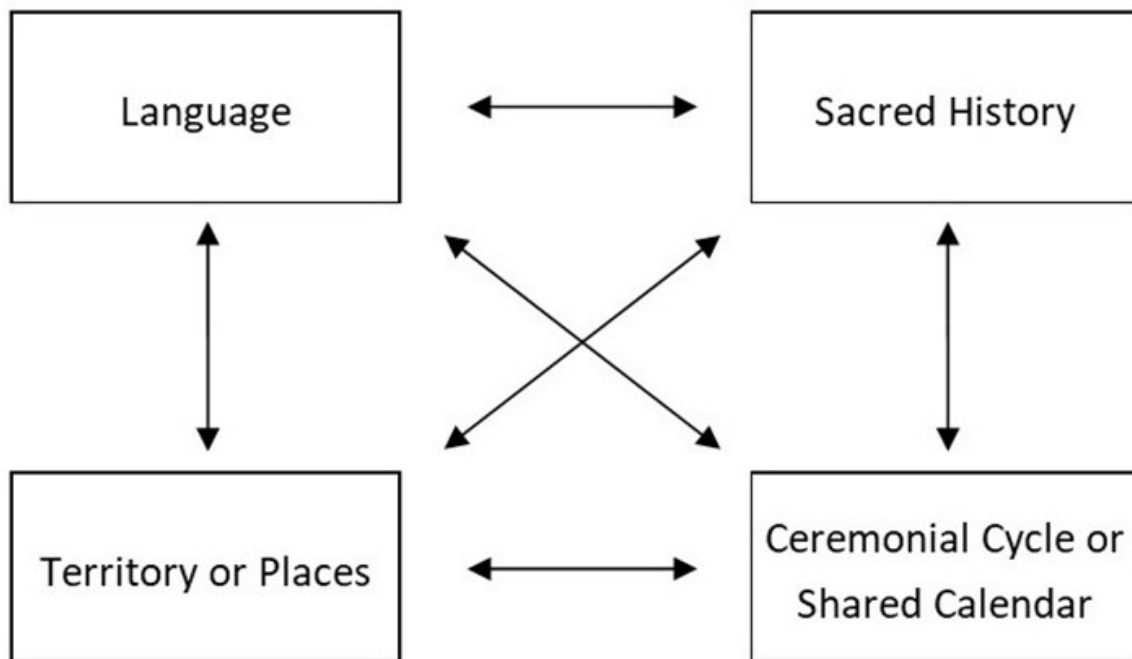
### MODELS FOR CRITIQUING 4-H SUCCESS WITHIN INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

To our knowledge, 4-H professionals do not currently use any theoretical frameworks that are designed specifically to serve Indigenous communities. Our mandate as an organization to create high-quality PYD experiences for demographically representative youths necessitates that we put serious effort into creating, or identifying, relevant models for serving Indigenous communities.

The Peoplehood Model is a widely accepted theoretical framework within AIS (Holm et al., 2003). It is an inclusive and dynamic matrix for describing Indigenous ways of being and knowing (Figure 1, Holm et al., 2003; Stratton & Washburn, 2008). Holm et al. (2003) have suggested that “peoples” generally have shared language, place, ceremonial cycle/calendar, and history. Each of these factors “intertwine[s], interpenetrate[s], and interact[s],” forming a basis for how a group relates and adapts to different contexts and environments (p. 13).

Holm et al.’s model has been used widely in applied and academic work. The model has structured research within AIS (e.g., Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Ellasante, 2019; Hannel, 2015; Walking Woman, 2019) and analyses of Indigenous literature (e.g., Pexa, 2019; Stratton and Washburn, 2008). It has also been cited in research and professional publications on non-Indigenous minorities and marginalized communities (e.g., Ellasante, 2019) and informed the conversation around international First Nations sovereignty (e.g., Corntassel, 2003).

In this article, we use the Peoplehood Model to evaluate the cultural relevance of reported programming with AI/AN youths. Our assumption is that programming should reflect a participant’s identity and values. We accept that a primary tenet of 4-H programming must be the inclusion of



**Figure 1.** Characteristics of the labor market.

*Note.* Adapted from Holm et al., 2003. Holm et al. (2003) have argued that a people’s language uniquely characterizes their world and how it is perceived. Place provides a setting for experience, memory, and history. Ceremony and traditional calendars mark symbolic and practical events and the passage of time. History is the story of these interactions and dialogues, a recording of the past and a guide for the future. These four elements interact to create the evolving experience that individuals and groups use to define self and culture (Basso, 1996; Holm et al., 2003). These elements can help frame 4-H efforts with Indigenous peoples.

difference and the formation of common experience between participants (Fields, 2020).

## METHODS

Kahn et al.'s (2003) five steps to conduct a systematic review framed our research: (1) Frame the question, (2) identify relevant publications, (3) assess research quality, (4) summarize evidence, and (5) interpret the findings. Our first goal for this paper was to determine the existing body of Extension literature detailing 4-H Club level programming with First Nations communities. We did this through a systematic review of Extension literature. Second, we critiqued these publications in terms of their inclusivity of First Nations peoples by using the Peoplehood Model.

We systematically searched significant journals for Cooperative Extension and PYD. Search terms were determined prior to the beginning of the review (Table 1). All articles were closely examined to verify mention of “Tribal,” “Native,” or “Indian” in context with “4-H” or “youth.” Any articles referencing youth programs and Indigenous populations were included.

We sorted resulting publications into three classifications: “Direct,” “Indirect,” and “No Direct.” Direct articles relayed results of programming that directly served Indigenous youths. Indirect articles included Native youths in a program population, but the research relayed did not specifically target the AI/AN audience. No Direct publications mentioned AI/AN youths but did not provide results of programming. Articles were qualitatively coded into the appropriate classification.

In addition, we used the Peoplehood Model to critique whether programs were reflective of a group’s identity and values. Our approach determined whether articles directly or

indirectly included the four core elements of Peoplehood—that is, (1) language, (2) place, (3) ceremonial cycle or calendar, and (4) history (Holm et al., 2003). We conducted a systematic word search to determine whether phrases associated with the Peoplehood Model were present (Table 1). In addition, each article was qualitatively reviewed for inclusion of the Peoplehood elements. Publications with themes related to the four elements but described in different language were included. Results are summarized in discrete (Saldaña, 2015) categories for our systematic search and narrative for our qualitative analysis.

## RESULTS

Thirteen articles referencing Indigenous youths were identified in the journals searched (Table 2). Five articles were classified as “Direct,” meaning that they relayed results of programming that directly served Indigenous youths. Zero articles were coded as “Indirect,” meaning that Native youths were included in a program population, but the research relayed did not specifically target the AI/AN audience. Eight articles were classified as “No Direct,” meaning that they mentioned AI/AN youths without providing programming results.

Each journal article classified as “No Direct” is presented in Table 3 ( $n = 8$ ). Also included is specific terminology present in each article, the source journal, and the topic being discussed when the search term is mentioned within the article.

Each journal article classified as “Direct” is presented in Table 4 ( $n = 5$ ). Specific terminology present in each article, the source journal, and the topic are included.

Five of the 13 publications in our review included the Peoplehood Element search terms (Tables 2 and 5). Three

**Table 1.** Journals and Search Terms

Aspect of search	Details
Journal searched	<i>Journal of Child and Family Studies</i> (JCFS) <i>Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship</i> (JCES) <i>Journal of Extension</i> (JOE) <i>Journal of Human Sciences and Extension</i> (JHSE) <i>Journal of Youth Development</i> (JYD)
Search terms	“Native American Youth and 4-H Positive Youth Development”; “Native American Youth and 4-H Youth”; “Native American Youth and 4-H”; “Native American Youth”; “Tribal Youth and 4-H Positive Youth Development”; “Tribal Youth and 4-H Youth”; “Tribal Youth and 4-H”; “Tribal Youth”; “Indian Country and 4-H Positive Youth Development”; “Indian Country and 4-H Youth”; “Indian Country and 4-H”; “Indian Country”; “American Indian Alaska Native and 4-H Positive Youth Development”; “American Indian Alaska Native and 4-H Youth”; “American Indian Alaska Native and 4-H”; “American Indian Alaska Native”
Peoplehood element search terms	“Language”; “Dialect”; “Land”; “Territory”; “Place”; “Ancestral”; “History”; “Sacred history”; “Shared history”; “Ceremony”; “Ceremonial cycle”; “Calendar”; “Traditional calendar”



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**Table 2.** Summary of Articles by Classification, Search-Term Mentions, and Source Journal

Article classification	Count of articles with search terms	Count of articles with Peoplehood-element search terms	Source journals
Total identified (N)	13	5	JOE, JYD, JHSE, JCFS, JCES
Direct	5	4	JOE, JCFS, JCES
Indirect	0	0	
No direct	8	1	JOE, JYD, JHSE

**Table 3.** Articles With “No Direct” Content

Article	Source journal	Search terms present	Topic
Hensley et al. (2007)	JOE	Native American Youth and 4-H	Belonging matters for all youths.
Barcelona & Quinn (2011)	JYD	Tribal youth and 4-H youth	The relevance of cultural competency in youth development is growing.
LaVergne (2013)	JOE	Native American youth; 4-H youth development	Professionals identified that lack of knowledge of the program was the biggest barrier for youths of color and disabilities.
Borden et al. (2014)	JOE	Tribal youth and 4-H youth	No specific reference to tribal youths.
Fox & LaChenaye (2015)	JHSE	Native American; 4-H youth development	Professional competencies for working across cultures.
LaVergne (2015b)	JYD	Native American; 4-H youth development	Professional competencies for working across cultures.
Lopes et al. (2018)	JOE	Indian Country and 4-H Youth	International 4-H program design.
Lewis et al. (2018)	JOE	Tribal youth and 4-H	No reference to Native American youths. Some youths of color identified feeling disconnected from their club as a contributing factor in dropping out.

**Table 4.** Articles With “Direct” Content

Article	Source journal	Search terms	Topic
Alves (1993)	JOE	Native American; 4-H youth development	Culturally responsive lessons for Extension professionals serving tribal communities.
Aschenbrener & Johnson (2017)	JCFS	Native American; 4-H youth development	Using a strengths model to focus on strengths and assets.
Vettern & Flage (2018)	JOE	Native American; 4-H youth development	Mentoring and building relationships between tribal youths and caring adults in a youth-adult partnership yielded numerous intended and unintended outcomes.
Garbow et al. (2019)	JOE	Indian Country and 4-H Youth	Using storytelling to connect to cultural legends to introduce and teach financial concepts.
Jones & Skogrand (2015)	JCES	Native American; 4-H youth development	Caring adults and culturally relevant activities are key to working with Native youths.

of these did not focus on Indigenous identity as a core program factor, nor were specific mechanisms for assessment or programmatic success discussed (Alves, 1993; Fox & LaChenaye, 2015; Jones & Skogrand, 2015). The remaining two articles—Garbow et al. (2019) and Vettern and Flage (2018)—focused on Native culture as a primary program element.

Garbow et al. (2019) have discussed using traditional stories to teach financial management skills to Ojibwe youths and families. The authors have written, “For each lesson, the legend was shared orally or read individually, and questions were asked about the story. Financial activities and discussion followed sharing of the legend, allowing participants to make connections between the legend and targeted financial concepts” (2019, para. 5). Language, place, ceremony, and history were a central focus of the program, which hybridized responsible financial habits and significant Ojibwe stories and actions. Ritual, such as the Ojibwe Smudging Ceremony, was part of the program (Garbow et al., 2019).

Vettern and Flage (2018) have discussed culturally engaging programs in which youths took leadership roles in community activities and businesses. Indigenous youths had “opportunities for . . . engagement in local businesses or community organizations. Through endeavors such as working at Sioux Image [a youth printing company] or running the Red Gym of Dreams [a youth recreation center], youths realized the importance of these efforts to community development and saw the opportunity to make a difference” (Vettern & Flage, 2018, para. 22). The authors have suggested

American communities. Finally, in the articles discussing culturally responsive programming, there is little connection to broader best practices. The single exception is arguably Vettern and Flage (2018).

## DISCUSSION

The dearth of literature is problematic for the 4-H organization, as it strives to provide a high-quality youth development experience to all members (National 4-H Council, 2015). It is clear that we lack programmatic data and a broad strategy for PYD in Indigenous communities. Given the profound impacts that PYD can have in marginalized communities (e.g., Edwards et al., 2007; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; J. V. Lerner et al., 2009; R. M. Lerner & J. V. Lerner, 2013), this status quo is unacceptable. However, 4-H can better serve Indigenous communities in several concrete ways.

### CONCRETE ACTIONS THAT 4-H PROFESSIONALS SHOULD TAKE

The most immediately achievable action is for 4-H professionals to publish on their programming. We are aware of several successful initiatives cited by the AEBC American Indian/Alaska Native Champion Group that have produced meaningful results (4-H Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee, 2020). These and similar efforts—successful or not—must be shared broadly. In deepening our academic knowledge base, we can better inform a cycle of designing,

**Table 5.** Mention of Peoplehood Model Elements Search Terms by Article, Chronologically

Article classification	Article	Peoplehood elements present (yes or no)			
		Language	Place or territory	History	Ceremonial cycle or calendar
Direct	Alves (1993)	Yes	No	No	No
No direct	Hensley et al. (2007)	No	No	No	No
No direct	Barcelona & Quinn (2011)	No	No	No	No
No direct	LaVergne (2013)	No	No	No	No
No direct	Borden et al. (2014)	No	No	No	No
No direct	Fox & LaChenaye (2015)	Yes	No	No	No
No direct	LaVergne (2015b)	No	No	No	No
Direct	Aschenbrener & Johnson (2017)	No	No	No	No
No direct	Lopes et al. (2018)	No	No	No	No
No direct	Lewis et al. (2018)	No	No	No	No
Direct	Vettern & Flage (2018)	No	Yes	Yes	No
Direct	Garbow et al. (2019)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Direct	Jones & Skogrand (2015)	Yes	No	Yes	No

*Note.* “Yes” is used to represent the presence of the Peoplehood Model characteristic in the journal article from a keyword search and from subsequent qualitative analysis. “No” means that there was no reference to the Peoplehood Model characteristic in the article.



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assessing, and adapting programs to serve Indigenous peoples.

National 4-H Council's work on Latinx outreach has produced valuable tools for Extension. Similar work must be done to provide tools for 4-H Extension professionals and volunteers. We must also assess existing resources and adapt existing work to better guide our efforts with First Nations peoples.

Our programs need to be made relevant for all stakeholders. We found that place, language, history, and ceremonial cycles were rarely mentioned, yet their presence seemed to yield profoundly meaningful results (e.g., Garbow et al., 2019). The elements of the Peoplehood Model promote inclusion in addition to a positive sense of identity and cultural pride. We believe that this model has broader applications, not simply as a tool of critique but as a primary framework for 4-H program design and assessment.

### BUILDING ON EXISTING 4-H PHILOSOPHY

The 4-H community has many similarities to the Peoplehood Model and to Indigenous philosophy (Brendtro et al., 1991; Kress, 2003). The language used in 4-H can be overwhelming to those unfamiliar or without the background. Participating families have often been a part of the 4-H community for three, four, or even five generations. Yet 4-H is a relatively young organization in comparison to hundreds or thousands of years of cultural memory, as is the case with Indigenous communities. However, these kinds of cultural themes are universally human. The potential for a common conversation, at least in part, already exists within 4-H culture.

Culture is essentially a means of incorporating new ideas. Each culture has rules for interaction, methods of including new people, and rationales for not doing so. These guidelines are the result of a hard-learned and much-repeated lesson of history: Communities that do not change—that do not bring in the ideas of outside groups—will cease to exist. This understanding is important. We can rationalize the reasons that programs do not work or that certain groups are hard to reach. This information is not useful. We must recognize where our philosophy comes from and create the dialogue to move the 4-H organization forward.

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