

Award Recipients' Perceived Benefits of a PK-12 Engagement Awards Program



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Abstract

Faculty and staff in higher education are motivated by various factors to engage in pre-college programs. Award programs can be a tool to engage faculty and staff in mission-focused programs such as discovery, learning, or engagement. This study described the perceived benefits of an engagement award that recognized faculty and staff who had excelled in outreach and program engagement. Data included quantitatively scaled items and qualitative open-ended response items from award recipients across Purdue University's College of Agriculture. Award recipients reported benefits included increased overall perceived value of the PK-12 engagement program, increased recognition of their program excellence and impact, an increased dissemination of program activities and outcomes, career benefits, and networking opportunities. The funding that accompanied the award was reported to offer support for the program and development of the program. Findings of this

study offer insightful information to guide the development of engagement awards for other programs.

Keywords: higher education, PK-12 engagement, awards and recognition

The PK-12 engagement program was designed to engage students, teachers, parents, and grandparents by building relationships and networking opportunities. PK-12 engagement is guided by PK-12 Council members that represent departments and administrative units in Purdue's College of Agriculture (Purdue Agriculture PK-12 Council, 2023). Led by the goal to build relationships with PK-12 audiences, the council advocates for and coordinates engagement activities across the college, university, and state. Focused on driving innovation, the Council provides opportunities for those engaging in or interested in engaging

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in PK-12 activities to share about current programs, resources, and collaborate.

The PK-12 Council was guided by the College of Agriculture Strategic Plan of 2015-2020. The College of Agriculture Strategic Plan identified the need for faculty and staff to engage with the PK-12 audience as a recruitment strategy for the university and for the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) career pipeline and the need to engage with the educators and parents of PK-12 audiences to build rapport and provide educational programs that fulfill stakeholder needs (Purdue College of Agriculture, 2023). The PK-12 Council members established outreach and engagement awards to formally recognize and reward faculty and staff that have excelled in outreach and engagement to encourage faculty and staff to engage with the target audiences.

Awards are tools that can be used as incentives and motivational influences to promote scholarship (Brawer et al., 2006). Awards can add value to a program and validate support from administration and institutions (Fitzpatrick & Moore, 2015). However, perceptions of the recipients may be different than the perceptions of others who are not recognized (Brawer et al., 2006), and studies have found mixed reviews of awards (Fitzpatrick & Moore; Huggett et al., 2012; Ruedrich et al., 1992). If awards address motivation, incentives, and program validation, then it is helpful to understand how award recipients perceive the benefits of the awards program.

The Faculty Engagement Model (FEM), originally developed by Wade and Demb (2009), was used to conceptually frame the study. FEM identifies the professional engagement roles of faculty - research, service, and teaching - and shows the relationship between the roles and the three dimensions of engagement: institutional dimension, professional dimension, and the personal dimension (Wade & Demb, 2009). First, regarding the institutional dimension, faculty are motivated to engage based on what their institution values. The culture of the institution, the values related to promotion and tenure, the value of research compared to teaching, the allocation of funding, and administrative support are factors that impact the institutional dimension. The factors of the institutional dimension serve as extrinsic motivators.

Second, the professional dimension includes the norms and values of the department and field. Engagement expectations and definitions may vary among departments and influence faculty engagement decisions. The professional position or status can influence engagement decisions, often an inverse relationship. The higher the rank in an organization, the less likely faculty will engage with external audiences. Similar to the institutional dimension, professional relationships are more often extrinsic motivators (Wade & Demb, 2009).

Finally, the personal dimension encompasses the intrinsic motivators that are personal values, time, personal and teaching identity, age, and personal experiences. "Faculty act on their intrinsic personal motivation for public service once the extrinsic motivation (tenure) has passed" (Wade & Demb, 2009, p. 11). Previous experiences within each dimension can affect engagement decisions. The

relationships among the dimensions and the professional roles are interconnected, which can help explain why faculty and staff engage in various activities.

Research on awards programs has mixed results (MacKenzie, 2007). Based on a review of literature from 1975 to 2006, some studies have shown awards are perceived as having potential positive impacts, such as sharing best practices, esteem and validation among colleagues, and supporting career promotion and progression (Fitzpatrick & Moore, 2015; Huggett et al., 2012; Seppala & Smith, 2019). Other studies have shown unintended consequences with awards when they are not aligned with institutional values and norms (Huggett et al., 2012), took considerably more time and effort, or when awards promote comparison and imply those who were not recognized are not doing enough to be recognized (Fitzpatrick & Moore, 2015; Seppala & Smith, 2019). Further, Seppala and Smith (2019) argued awards need to be part of a larger culture that the mission area of focus is valued and supported. Further, Huggett et al. (2012) recommended research on "conceptual frameworks, definitions, and systematic approaches" to examine and understand "the structures, processes, and impact of awards" (p. 916). This study was conducted to address the gap in the literature of what awardees perceived as the value and benefits of an awards program to support and enhance PK-12 engagement in Purdue's College of Agriculture.

The purpose of this study was to describe previous award recipients' perceptions of the perceived value of the PK-12 Awards Program and how the program supported engagement efforts and impact. Four research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent did PK-12 awards benefit staff and faculty?
2. How did the PK-12 award and funding benefit recipients?
3. How was the award funding utilized?
4. How many students, parents, and educators were reached through PK-12 engagement of the award recipients?

Materials and Methods

The College of Agriculture PK-12 Awards Program at Purdue University was started in 2016 to recognize faculty and staff for excellent and impact of PK-12 engagement and outreach efforts. Five cohorts of award recipients were recognized between 2016 to 2020, which represented 18 individuals (3 team awards and 12 individual awards). Recipients were nominated and then selected by a review committee based on criteria such as the impact of activities (number of participants reached and quality of engagement activities), innovation, relationships built and collaborative connections made, and the dissemination of their PK-12 activities. A questionnaire was developed to assess the award recipients' perceptions regarding the impact of the PK-12 Awards Program. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: (1) perceived value (12 items); (2) annual number of participants reached (3 items); (3) open-ended questions (3 questions); and (4) demographics (2 items). The questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts for face

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and content validity. After IRB approval, data were collected Qualtrics. Participants completed the questionnaire in approximately 10 minutes. Participants received two follow-up reminders. Twelve recipients responded to the survey (66.7% response rate). Of the 12 respondents, seven were faculty and five were staff. Of the past recipients who responded, ten were individual recipients and two received a team award. Data collection closed on May 10, 2021.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and rounded to the nearest hundredth. Qualitative data were inductively coded using descriptive and pattern coding techniques. Descriptive coding is applied to summarize responses into topics and was applied to the first cycle of coding the participant responses (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding produces meta-codes that organize the codes and provide a more meaningful synthesis. Pattern coding was applied to the second cycle of coding. Data were independently coded and then reviewed by two researchers. When coding the benefits of the award funding, quotes from participant responses were assigned a code that summarized the response. For example, "Any funding for this program is great, since there is very little funding" was summarized by "program." The codes "program," "program advancement," "program refresh," "facility improvements," and "program expansion" were then categorized under "program support." The codes "more collaborations" and "increase in participant reach" were categorized under "networking." The codes "promotion and tenure," "evidence for promotion," "legitimized PK-12 work," "credentials to increase participants' value of the program," and "promotion and tenure" were categorized as "career." The response codes were then organized into the

three award funding benefit categories: "program support," "networking," and "career."

When coding the utilization of the award funding, key quotes were identified from each participant response and assigned a code that summarized the response. For example, "Help fund Science Theater classes and presentation of performances" was assigned "presentation." The codes "presentation," "workshops," "professional development," and "student activities" were categorized as "engagement." The codes "materials" and "curriculum" were categorized as "project and program development." The response "COVID has impacted the numbers above" was coded as "was not able to use the funding" and was categorized as "barriers." The award funding utilization codes were then organized into the three categories: "engagement," "project and program development," and "barriers."

Results and Discussion

Regarding the first research question, on the scale of "not at all" to "a great deal," participants predominantly responded "quite a bit" to the benefits of the PK-12 awards (Table 1). The most highly rated benefits were as follows: (1) increased overall perceived value of PK-12 Engagement Program (82% agreed "quite a bit & a great deal"), (2) increased recognition of recipients' PK-12 excellence and impact (75%), (3) increased dissemination of PK-12 activities and outcomes (58%), and (4) improved existing PK-12 activities (58%). Recipients agreed (quite a bit & a great deal) the award provided evidence for promotion and merit increases (55%), increased their PK-12 impact on participants (54%), strengthened collaborations for PK-

Table 1.

Extent of the Perceived Impacts of the PK-12 Award Program

Item	Percent Agreement					N
	None / Not at All	Very Little	Some-what	Quite a Bit	A Great Deal	
Increase the overall perceived value of PK-12 Engagement in the College of Agriculture	0%	9%	9%	27%	55%	11
Increase the recognition of your PK-12 excellence and impact	0%	8.33%	16.67%	25%	50%	12
Increase dissemination of PK-12 activities and outcomes	8.33%	8.33%	25%	25%	33.33%	12
Improve existing PK-12 activities	0%	16.67%	25%	50%	8.33%	12
Provide evidence for promotion and merit increases	36%	0%	9%	0%	55%	11
Increase your PK-12 impact on participants	9%	18%	18%	27%	27%	11
Strengthen collaborations for PK-12 engagement	0%	16.67%	33.33%	33.33%	16.67%	12
Start a new idea (innovation) for PK-12 engagement	8.33%	16.67%	25%	25%	25%	12
Expand relationships for PK-12 engagement	0%	25%	25%	33.33%	16.67%	12
Increase your scholarship of PK-12 engagement	16.67%	16.67%	16.67%	25%	25%	12
Increase your PK-12 reach (number of participants)	8.33%	16.67%	25%	25%	25%	12
Provide professional development for you and your team	16.67%	41.67%	0%	16.67%	25%	12

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12 engagement (50%), started a new idea (innovation) for PK-12 engagement (50%), expanded relationships for PK-12 engagement (50%), increased their scholarship of PK-12 engagement (50%), and increased the number of their PK-12 participants reached (50%). Fifty-eight percent of the award recipients reported the award provided “none” to “very little” professional development for them and their team. This means participants did not use award funds for their own professional development, which was reflected in using the funds for their program participants, strengthening partnerships, or improving existing PK-12 activities.

Award recipients agreed the PK-12 awards helped them improve their PK-12 activities and curriculum, and it increased their credibility among their peers, administrators, and external stakeholders. This aligned with the Huggett and colleagues’ (2012) findings and the FEM because faculty and staff perceive what the institution values and the PK-12 awards increased the perceived value of the PK-12 program. AbiGhannam and Dudo (2021) stated that extrinsic motivators, such as awards, can encourage an increase in dissemination of activities, outcomes, and collaborations. It is likely that the PK-12 awards provided similar outcomes. The reported lack of professional development provided by the award was not supported by the findings of Fitzpatrick and Moore (2005) who found award recipients can view the award itself as an opportunity for professional development, yet recipients used the funds to advance their PK-12 partnership and activities through reflection and program development. AbiGhannam and Dudo (2021) offered the explanation that infrastructure is often not in place to support public engagement. Seppala and Smith (2019) further added that it should not be the recipients’ responsibility to build supportive structures. However, the PK-12 engagement program provided monthly webinars that offered engagement support and professional development opportunities open to all faculty, staff and graduate students in the College of Agriculture and was not just for the award recipients. The award recipients did not likely perceive the monthly webinars as part of the awards program.

Recipient Benefits of the PK-12 Awards

Regarding the second research question, eight of the 12 participants responded to an open-ended question regarding the perceived benefits from the funding. Three categories emerged from the responses (Table 2). Program support was a reported benefit, including opportunities to improve facilities, expand programs with limited funding, update program content, and general program expenses. Networking was expressed through descriptions of increased collaboration opportunities and increasing the number of participants reached. Career benefits emerged among responses that reported the award provided evidence for promotion and other awards and added evidence to their professional documents which echoed the reported impacts of Huggett et al. (2012). Also, recipients’ responses supported Seppala and Smith’s (2019) assertion that awards that clearly support career advancements, which can enhance faculty and staff motivation.

Participants claimed the awards program legitimized the PK-12 program and their work, which reiterated the quantitative responses and supported AbiGhannam and Dudo’s (2021) and Fitzpatrick and Moore’s (2019) findings that awards can provide validation for recipients. Coded within the category of “career” was the reported benefit that the award program “increase[d] the perceived value of the program from the participants’ perspectives” and emulates Huggett et al.’s (2012) results that “Stakeholder buy-in is critical to adoption, implementation, and sustainability [of awards]” (p. 917). Recipients reported that the benefits from the award supported their PK-12 programs, networking opportunities, and career merit. Participants in this study expressed that the awards offered support for the PK-12 program, especially financial support. However, these results did not support Braver et al.’s (2006) finding that awards lacking monetary value were still valued for the award and the recognition. The awards program also offered networking opportunities for the recipients, and the awards provided recipients evidence for career promotions and progression (Fitzpatrick & Moore, 2015; Huggett et al., 2012; Seppala & Smith, 2019). Faculty and staff in this study were motivated by the funding allocation and career incentives, which aligned with the institutional dimension the FEM—faculty and staff are extrinsically motivated by values related to promotion and tenure, funding, and administrative support (Wade & Demb, 2009).

Funding Utilization

Regarding the third research question, funding from the PK-12 awards utilization was collected using an open-ended question from 10 of the 12 participants. Three categories emerged from the responses (Table 3.) (<insert Table 3 here>). For the first category, funding was used to increase program engagement of PK-12 students, teachers, and parents. Specifically, recipients used it to fund presentations, workshops, professional development, and student activities. For the second category, funds were used for project and program development. Materials were purchased for program events or projects, and the curriculum was developed and shared.

The third category was barriers to utilizing funding. A few participants reported barriers to utilizing funding because they did not have access to the funds (did not know the funds were transferred to a department account) or were not able to spend the money during the pandemic in 2020. Among those who spent their funds, funding was utilized to increase program engagement and program development. This supported the FEM because funding serves as an extrinsic motivator regarding the institutional dimension of the model (Wade & Demb, 2009). Award recipients shared the PK-12 awards provided funding to improve existing PK-12 curriculum and engage in new activities to expand their engagement with broader audiences.

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Table 2.

Recipient Benefits of the Award Funding

Category	Code	Quotes
Program Support	Program	“Any funding for this program is great” “Provided me with a great deal of flexibility on my outreach activities. I have used the funds very strategically over time”
	Program Advancement	“I was able to use the funds to do something that I would NEVER have been able to do with my S&E or from a grant”
	Program Refresh	“The refresh of the KidsEcon Posters Curriculum Project website increased website visits”
	Facility Improvements	“We used the funds to develop a new lab”
Networking	Program Expansion	“These funds allowed me to expand beyond what I have been doing in the Purdue classrooms.” “It allowed me to do something that our department was unwilling to totally fund.”
	More collaborations	“More collaborations here and also outside of Purdue” “It set up a different stage for COA faculty to share their work outside of their labs, or peer-reviewed publications”
	Increase in participant reach	“Increased website visits” “It also increases the educational opportunities and impact for teachers and students”
	Credentials for other awards	“It has given me the credentials to help receive other awards” “University based awards are essential to faculty who could eventually be recognized by non-Purdue organizations”
Career	Evidence for Promotion	“Is an evidence that I put in my promotion document to demonstrate the great work that I have done”
	Legitimized PK-12 work	“Legitimized my PK-12 work in the minds of peers and administrators”
	Credentials to increase participants' value of the program	“Perceived value of the program from the participants' perspectives”
	Promotion and Tenure	“Highlight my PK-12 engagement in my P&T Document” “It is also an essential item on my NSF two page vitae.”

Audiences Reached

Regarding the fourth research question, participants recorded their engagement with students, parents, and educators. There was a cumulative total of 20,815 PK-12 students reached per year among the 12 participants, which equated to 1,892 PK-12 students reached annually per award recipient. The range of the data was 9,985 between the lowest and highest participants' total participants reached annually. There was a cumulative total of 1,895 parents reached per year, which equated to 237 parents reached annually per award recipient. The range of the

data was 1,495 parents reached. The cumulative total 4-H youth educators, K-12 teachers and volunteers reached per year was 2,008, which equated to 183 4-H youth educators, teachers and volunteers reached annually per award recipient. The range of the data was 1,160 educators. There was large variability among the engagement numbers reported by award recipients. The reported engagement numbers included personal (face-to-face) and digital interactions such as online users of websites and online resources.

The 12 award recipients reported they collectively reached a total of 24,718 participants per year through their

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Table 3.

Utilization of the PK-12 Award Funding

Category	Code	Quotes
Engagement	Presentation	“Help fund Science Theater classes and presentation...”
	Workshops	“Supported workshops featuring curriculum materials”
	Professional Development	“I used it to support the program development, and professional development.”
	Student Activities	“Funds have supported student projects” “Funds will support relationships with Felege Hiywot Center in Indianapolis”
Project and Program Development	Materials	“I used the funds to hire a relatively famous illustrator to develop colorful and fun illustrations”
		“The funding was used to support supplies that were distributed to participants from rural high schools”
		“some was used for supplies.” “Hired some undergraduate students to develop a hydraulics lab”
	Curriculum	“Supported workshops featuring curriculum materials and updating the KidsEcon Posters Curriculum Project website.”
		“I used the funding to develop online modules and interactive notebooks for a program I created for elementary school students
Barriers	Unable to use the funding	“COVID has impacted the numbers above”

PK-12 efforts. On average, the award recipients reached a total of 2,312 participants annually. Of the total participants reached annually, 84% were PK-12 students, 8% were parents, and 8% were 4-H youth educators, teachers, and volunteers (Table 4.). The FEM was supported by the evidence of community involvement within the PK-12 engagement program as reported by the award recipients. The collective effort of award recipients demonstrates the number of participants reached by faculty and staff who were recognized for excellence in PK-12 engagement. This evidence can help support the importance of pre-recruitment efforts of faculty and staff who interact with and build relationships with PK-12 students and teachers. Moreover, PK-12 engagement efforts are not commonly tracked and reported as pre-recruitment interactions. Colleges of Agriculture may find value in knowing the number of PK-12 students, teachers and parents reached on an annual basis

Table 4.

Participants Reach by PK-12 Award Recipients

Participants	Number Reached per Year	% of Total
Students	20,815	84%
Parents	1,985	8%
Educators	2,008	8%

so they can align their recruitment and marketing efforts (Baker et al., 2013) with PK-12 engagement activities. Asking award recipients to report their annual reach of PK-12 engagement activities is one step to start to estimate part of the footprint of PK-12 activities in a College of Agriculture.

Summary

The authors sought to describe award recipients' perceptions of the PK-12 engagement award program, the benefits of the award including the complementary funding, the utilization of the funding, and the audiences reached through engagement. Results from this study found that awards with funding can provide incentives, such as financial and career incentives, for faculty and staff to promote and improve their PK-12 engagement programs. Awards with financial support should be implemented for programs that are looking to expand and increase program support. Funding that accompanies an award is a strategy of support for the program if the delivery of funding is clear to the participants so they can utilize the funding. Awards with funding provide opportunities for program growth and development as reported by the recipients. Awards such as the PK-12 engagement award program can serve as extrinsic motivators to broaden the audience of a program (Rockich-Winston et al., 2018). It is recommended that recipients be celebrated and recognized through various

communication channels including public websites and social media (Seppala & Smith, 2019) and venues to share best practices (Fitzpatrick & Moore, 2015). Results supported the institutional dimension of the Faculty Engagement Model (Wade & Demb, 2009); although professional and personal dimensions were implied, more research is needed to better understand the relationships among the three dimensions of the FEM. For example, engaging faculty and staff to interact with PK-12 students and teachers through high-touch communication channels (Baker et al., 2013) and on-campus research experiences (Robotham & Windon, 2023) supports Colleges of Agriculture strategic recruitment efforts and development of future professionals for the growing workforce for the agriculture, food and natural resources industry (Fernandez et al., 2020). It would be useful to understand faculty and staff's perceptions of the personal and professional dimensions and how they contribute to the institution's culture and value of PK-12 engagement.

Future research should explore the challenges, barriers, and unintended and negative consequences of awards programs within the PK-12 Engagement program and similar programs, which echoes previous work by Fitzpatrick and Moore (2013) and Huggett et al. (2012). Moreover, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews could be conducted to better understand more specifics and stories regarding impacts of the awards program. Future research should further explore how the award funding was utilized and how the award influenced recipients' program involvement in the following years. For example, Huggett et al. (2012) and AbiGhannam and Dudo (2021) reported that award recognition was often accompanied by an increase in responsibilities and other impacts that could be perceived as negative ramifications. This study utilized a descriptive design, so future research studies should conduct causal studies to further understand the effects of a faculty and staff award program. Because the dimensions of the FEM are interconnected, future research should include factors within the personal dimension (Wade & Demb, 2009). Moreover, researchers should investigate why award recipients did not use the funds to invest in their professional development, perceived negative impacts of the awards program, and unintended consequences that could provide meaningful actions to build on faculty and staff motivation to engage with PK-12 audiences. Finally, future research should be done to increase the number of participants to determine construct validity of the questionnaire. This pragmatic approach to asking participants to respond to items representing the perceived benefits was useful for evaluating the awards program, but it may help better understand faculty and staffs' motivations regarding various awards programs used in in universities.

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