VRKC Taxonomy
Overview

VRKC: Volunteer Research Knowledge Competency Taxonomy

Intended Audience:
4-H volunteers

Learning Outcomes:
- Volunteers will identify the six domains of the VRKC Taxonomy.
- Volunteers will list reasons why the VRKC Taxonomy is important to 4-H volunteers and staff.
- Volunteers will explain how the VRKC Taxonomy can be used in 4-H volunteer development.

Time:
20 – 30 minutes

Supplies Needed:
- Pencils and paper
- Markers and flip chart paper
- Power Point, Computer and LCD Projector
- Handouts and Evaluations

Do Ahead:
Prepare handouts.

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Volunteerism for the Next Generation:
http://nextgeneration.4-h.org/volunteerism/

4-H National Headquarters:
http://www.national4-h headquarters.gov/

INTRODUCTION

"What skills or competencies will volunteers need in order to effectively deliver 4-H programs and projects in the next decade?" This simple question started the nationwide research project that resulted in the VRKC, Volunteer Research Knowledge Competency Taxonomy. This work was vetted by 4-H National Headquarters in 2008. It stands as a cornerstone piece that guides the training and support for 4-H volunteers across the country. (Power Point Slides 1, 2)

WHAT TO DO

Volunteers who are competent in the utilization of these skills in their role as 4-H club volunteers will provide the best possible experience for 4-H youth members through a balanced program of activities and experiences focused on positive youth development. Competencies are underlying characteristics of people and indicate "ways of behaving or thinking, generalizing across situations and enduring for a reasonably long period of time" (Guion, 1991). "Volunteer leadership competencies reflect the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute towards successful governance of the organization" (Pealow, 2002).

Activity 1: What Do You Need?
Divide the participants into small groups. Provide each with a piece of flip chart paper. Have each group brainstorm a list of the skills and competencies that they need in their 4-H volunteer roles. Have each group post and share their lists. Have the total group discuss: What are the similarities you observe between the lists? What are the differences? How could this group come together to form one common list? Why is it important to identify the skills and competencies that 4-H volunteers need to have to perform their service?

(Power Point Slide 3) The VRKC Taxonomy is based on the identified skills and competencies that volunteers will need in order to effectively deliver 4-H Youth Development programs and activities in the next decade. The research was led by Ken Culp III, Ph.D.; Renee McKee, Ph.D., and Patrick Nestor, Ed. D. It included input from volunteers and staff in 21 states in all four Extension regions. From that research, six domains were identified (Power Point Slide 4). Each domain includes five to eight competencies.

Distribute Handout 1 and discuss each domain, its definition, and the competencies within the domain (Power Point Slides 5-10). Note that the list is developed based on cumulative order of importance, competence and use, as determined by the results of the research study. Have the group discuss: What are the similarities and differences with the VRKC Taxonomy list and the list developed by participants?

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VRKC: Volunteer Research Knowledge Competency Taxonomy for 4-H Youth Development:
http://www.national4-h headquarters.gov/comm/vrkc.pdf

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References for this lesson:
- Culp, III, K., McKee, R., & Nestor, P. (2008). Volunteer Research, Knowledge & Competency Taxonomy for 4-H Youth Development. Retrieved 4/2010. http://nextgeneration. 4-h.org/volunteerism/
- Guion, R.M. (1991). Personnel assessment, selection, and placement. In M.D. Dunnette & L.M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology.* Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Pealow, J. (2002). Volunteer Leadership Training – Can We Get Beyond Orientation? Retrieved February 8, 2006: http://www.amces.com/publica tions/volunteer_leadership.htm

(Power Point Slide 11) The VRKC Taxonomy provides a framework for providing training and support to 4-H volunteers. This includes:

- Volunteers can use the VRKC Taxonomy to request training and support in specific areas to develop their personal skills and competencies for their 4-H roles.
- Staff can use the taxonomy to structure volunteer workshops or include skill building opportunities for volunteers included in other volunteer training opportunities.
- The framework can also be used as a tool for focusing county, state, regional and national volunteer training opportunities so as to provide volunteers with the knowledge and skills they have said they need to be effective in their 4-H roles.
- The taxonomy also provides a framework for 4-H Youth Development staff development. Staff need to be proficient in these areas as they train and support volunteers.

Conclusion:
The VRKC Taxonomy is a research-based framework that provides volunteers with the training and support they need and have requested to be effective in their 4-H volunteer roles. The outcome will be quality positive youth development programs, activities, and events for 4-H members. (Power Point Slide 12)

TALK IT OVER
Reflect:
- What are the six domains of the VRKC Taxonomy? What are the competencies located under the six domains?
- Why is the VRKC Taxonomy important to volunteers?

Apply:
- How can the VRKC Taxonomy be used by volunteers and staff?

EVALUATION
Ask each participant to complete the evaluation tool (Handout 2).

ENHANCE or SIMPLIFY
Have participants prioritize the competencies in order of perceived importance, frequency of use, and/or local need to provide a list for future workshops.

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Handout 1

VRKC: Volunteer Research Knowledge and Competency Taxonomy

Based on the findings of the studies, the VRKC Taxonomy is expressed in six domains; Communications, Organization, 4-H Program Management, Educational Design & Delivery, Positive Youth Development, and Interpersonal Skills. These six domains are listed in their cumulative order of importance, competence, and use, as determined by the results of the study.

Communications
Volunteers demonstrate the ability to create, deliver, and interpret information effectively through formal and non-formal means. Specific competencies include:
    Speaking Skills
    Listening Skills
    Writing Skills
    Non-Verbal Skills
    Information Delivery & Dissemination
    Marketing & Public Relations
    Use of Technology

Organization
Volunteers demonstrate the ability to engage others in planning, providing, and delivering positive 4-H youth development programming in a community. This focuses on the following individual competencies:
    Planning & Organizing
    Time Management
    Parent Recruitment & Involvement
    Delegating Tasks to Parents
    Service to the Community
    Marketing & Publicity

4-H Program Management
Volunteers must understand and follow appropriate policies, procedures, and safety guidelines when acting on behalf of Extension. Competencies included are:
    Organization & Structure of Extension
    Upholding the 4-H Mission
    Risk Management/Risk Reduction
    Liability Awareness and Reduction
    Club Management
    Behavior Management
    Record Keeping
    Financial Management
    Computer Skills

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Educational Design & Delivery
Volunteers demonstrate the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate research-based learning opportunities that effectively promote positive personal development. This includes the following competencies:
    Use of Age-Appropriate Activities
    Utilization of Multiple Teaching Strategies
    Understanding of Differences in Learning Styles
    Knowledge of Subject Matter
    Team Building Skills
    Application of Experiential Learning
    Program Evaluation Methods

Positive Youth Development
Volunteers demonstrate the ability to intentionally and appropriately apply the principles and best practices that result in the positive development of youth. Specific competencies include:
    Developing Life Skills
    Leadership Skills
    Understanding Ages & Stages of Youth Development
    Empowerment of Others
    Practicing Youth-Adult Partnerships
    Ability to Motivate & Encourage Youth
    Appreciating Diversity

Interpersonal Characteristics
Volunteers demonstrate the ability to develop effective relationships, work competently with individuals and groups, and express empathy and understanding for others. This set of "soft skills" includes:
    Care for Others
    A Compassionate Nature
    Acceptance of Others
    Honesty, Ethics, Morality
    Patience
    Ability to Develop & Strengthen Relationships
    Flexibility

Handout 2

Evaluation

Please complete the following evaluation. The results of the evaluation will be shared with those who work with the program. Your participation in this evaluation is voluntary. Your responses will be combined with the responses of all other participants and you will not be individually identified on any report prepared.

Please answer the questions by circling the number that indicates your level of understanding of the topics listed before and after the training.

1 = Very little understanding   2 = Understand somewhat   3 = Clear understanding

	NOW – After the training			THEN – Before the training		
1. I can identify the six domains of the VRKC Taxonomy.	1	2	3	1	2	3
2. I can list reasons why the VRKC Taxonomy is important to volunteers and staff.	1	2	3	1	2	3
3. I can explain how the VRKC Taxonomy can be used in 4-H volunteer development.	1	2	3	1	2	3

- Please list at least two ideas or skills that you learned as a result of this presentation.

- How will you use what you learned in this presentation?

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