

Administrators' Perspectives on Organizational Environmental Factors Facing 4-H Youth Development

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Abstract

4-H is the largest youth development organization in the United States and is the youth development program of the Land-Grant University's Cooperative Extension system. A qualitative study of 13 4-H Program Leaders and seven Cooperative Extension Directors was conducted to explore the perspectives Extension Administrators hold about the organizational environmental factors facing the 4-H program. Data were analyzed using a qualitative open coding methodology. Five themes emerged from the study in response to the identified environmental factors: 1) key components of the traditional club model need to be ensured in all programming conducted; 2) the need to develop a club programming matrix to help county-level staff manage the impact and their workload; 3) good partners will expand the 4-H programs' capacity; 4) increased involvement of first generation youth and families is needed; and 5) intentional marketing and raising awareness of the "new 4-H brand." Adaptation poses important questions, challenges, and opportunities for the 4-H program. Because administrators represent a national population of Administrators, these insights can inform youth organizations in the United States and internationally.

Keywords: Youth Development; organizational adaptation; 4-H; environmental context

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1. Introduction

Youth development is supported across the globe by youth development organizations (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2017; Wium & Dimitrova, 2019). Yet the youth organization is often taken for granted; it is the brand, the facilitator, or the experience, but the considerations for how and why the organization exists is often overlooked (Lerner et al., 2019; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). However, the youth development organization structure, program design, and content are fundamental features of the program youth experience (Roholt et al., 2013; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016; Smith et al., 2021). To understand how and why a youth development organization is being influenced allows for youth development professionals to approach organizational strategy and adaptation informed and prepared.

The external organizational environment is constantly evolving and yet few studies have been reported about how, why, and what is causing youth development organizations to adapt to the needs of youth, perhaps that is because the program literature often looks at the specific outputs of change as programmatic updates (Raposa et al., 2019). There are a few organizational adaptations reported across the youth development literature. Legg et al. (2016) assessed a case of Canadian youth sport organizational change process, which reported that the process of change is complicated and can be moderated to ensure success. Wheeler (2000) explored organizational adaptation for youth development through a case of the Mi Casa Resource Center for Women and the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and found that youth development organizations can be restructured to be more responsive to environmental factors in order improve youth development practice. Change does pose considerable organizational risks for youth organizations (McKee et al., 2002). [Author B] relayed an example

of change that caused stakeholders to push back, which required the organization to clarify the mission and communicate differently.

To help inform the youth development field, this article looks at the case of the United States' largest youth serving organization—the 4-H Youth development program (Arnold & Rennekamp, 2020). We sought to expose the perspectives on environmental factors from administrators who are responsible for organizational direction. We also wanted to understand the response strategy to these environmental factors that are informing adaptation of the organization.

1.1 Context of the 4-H Youth Development Program

The 4-H program is administered by the network of land-grant universities (LGU) Cooperative Extension system (Extension). Extension's original mission was to “aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics, and to encourage the application of the same” (Smith-Lever Act, 1914, p. 1). Today, Extension's mission is interpreted to have a focus on: (a) agriculture and natural resources; (b) community development; (c) family and consumer health sciences; and, (d) 4-H youth development (Alexander et al., 2020). The youth program of the Extension system, 4-H youth development, experienced its genesis at the turn of the 20th century with the emergence of the technical educational movement (Braun, 1997).

The 4-H youth development program was birthed with the development of the Boys Corn and Girls Canning clubs that emerged in the early 1900's across the rural United States (Reck, 1951). Officially, the first 4-H club was established in Clark County, Ohio in 1902 (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). In 1916, this movement was officially adopted as the youth outreach model of the United States Department of Agriculture (Reck, 1951). In an age of rapid technology

development, youth were a valuable audience for rapid adoption of new technological and social change (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

The gendered 4-H boy and girl clubs emerged as informal competition groups to engage youth with new agricultural techniques. Once formalized, 4-H youth club work continued to engage youth in hands-on, nonformal learning. The 4-H program has progressed to serve not only rural youth, but all young people in areas of citizenship, STEM including agriculture, leadership, and healthy living (USDA-NIFA, 2016). Today, the 4-H program and Extension—through the network of LGUs—is the largest youth serving organization in the country (“4-H,” 2023).

The 4-H youth development program is the most recognized emblem and component of the Extension system (Astroth, 2007). Additionally, the 4-H program comes with core program elements that were established from its inception—such as traditional 4-H clubs—and has adapted not only new content but also delivery models. Participation in the 4-H youth development program can be passed from generation to generation, meaning that there can be a propensity for members to be children of alumni (Norrell-Aitch, 2015). The experiences of legacy youth members and first-generation youth are different, and the lack of organizational support can influence those two groups of members’ experiences (Norrell-Aitch, 2015). Therefore, the decisions by administrators affect who is served and may influence the organization long into the future. The 4-H Youth Development program’s continuity, adaptation, and generational influence make this Extension program area ripe for exploration.

2. Literature Review

National youth development programs across the U.S. have different organizational designs; many utilize a franchise model with varying degrees of alignment between national

organizational leaders and grassroots units. The 4-H youth development organization stands apart with a loosely coupled structure with three federal partners: United States Department of Agriculture, National 4-H Council, and the LGU system represented by the Association of Land-Grant and Public Universities (APLU) Extension Committee on Policy (ECOP), Extension Committee on Policy for 4-H (ECOP 4-H) and the National 4-H Program Leaders Working Group (PLWG). These three partners provide support and guidance to the network of 1862, 1890, and 1994 LGUs who establish operational rules, enforce policy and procedure, implement risk management, and deliver programming to the citizens of their respective states. This model has evolved over time and was solidified with a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2019 (APLU, 2019). The grassroots nature of the 4-H program requires research to understand LGU extension administrators' perspectives about the direction of the 4-H youth development organization to understand where and how the organization is adapting to the environmental factors facing the organization.

2.1 Extension

The parent organization of 4-H youth development—Extension—has had a rich discourse about organizational adaptation. The theorizing on Extension adaptation has offered three distinct shifts in organization orientation (Hoag, 2005): The first is that Extension is no longer relevant and will/should become extinct (Ward et al., 2009); the second is that a change in mission is causing organizational shortcomings because Extension has moved away from its roots in agriculture and lost support from historically significant supporters (Bull et al, 2004); and the third is that Extension has not moved away from a focus on agriculture and a resulting lament that this programmatic movement has not yet occurred (McDowell, 2004). Yet, more recently the existential call for the end of Extension has stopped and the discourse has focused on

a battle between the second and third approach for adaptation. However, adaptation is a response to the environmental context and [Author D] in a national study of Extension administrators found that Extension is responding to the changing environmental factors of financial resources technology, urbanization, and diversity in our community. Many of these adaptive forces were corroborated by Caillouet and Harder (2021), where urbanization, education with online technology, conflicting messages, and diverse audiences were reported for the state of Florida. Caillouet and Harder (2021) also found some recommended approaches to resolving the issue, through the focus on science-based information, building partnerships, and engaging stakeholders which reflected [Author B] findings in regards to mitigating shifting focus friction—a backlash resulting from change by Extension stakeholders.

2.2 4-H Program

The 4-H program has had a seemingly different dialogue about organizational direction in the literature. Whereas with Extension there was an existential examination of the existence, that discourse has not been explored within the literature. Rather, discourse has been focused on improving the program and reaching as many youth as possible. As such the literature has an emphasis on program evaluation and methodological advancements (i.e., Agans et al., 2020) that have resulted in a literature full of articles pushing towards providing positive youth development programming to new and diverse populations (e.g., first-generation 4-H youth ([Author F]); immigrant youth (Moncloa & Rodriguez, 2022); Indigenous youth ([Author E]); black youth (Smith et al., 2022; Smith & Wiley, 2021); Latinx youth (Hobbs & Sawer, 2009; Moncloa et al., 2019); LGBTQIA+ youth (Howard et al., 2021; Rand et al., 2021); Urban youth (Bovitz et al., 2018; Cano & Bankston, 1992); delivering social justice to diverse populations (Fields, 2020; Fields & Nathaniel, 2015); and, maximizing effective positive youth development

outcomes (e.g., 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold, 2018; Arnold & Gagnon, 2019; Arnold & Gagnon, 2020; Lerner et al., 2009); and, to lesser degrees the influence of technology on today's youth (e.g., Arnold & Rennekamp, 2020; Lee, & Horsley, 2017) and workforce readiness (Cochran et al., 2014; Schmutz et al., 2022); and, life skills (Fox et al., 2003; Kelsey & Fuhrman, 2020). Additionally, Borden et al. (2014) hypothesized that 4-H needed to change the program delivery model towards:

- A. “Greater emphasis on research-based curricula. These efforts must reflect curricula that are of the highest quality, enabling all young people to achieve their potential...
- B. Transition the program from a youth development organization to a more focused community youth development organization... forming partnerships between the young people and the community at large.
- C. Empower youth to lead healthy, satisfying, productive lives.
- D. Provide asynchronous learning opportunities for adult volunteers, empowering them with skills to support youth in decision-making and leadership.
- E. Provide comprehensive professional development for all adults needing to be comfortable engaging young people in constructive and challenging activities that build their competence and foster supportive relationships.
- F. Continue the focus on youth participation at every step of the programming process... and simultaneously promote youth participation in their community.
- G. Conduct comprehensive research and evaluation studies that are focused on the goals of the organization. (p.3)”

For the 4-H organization, these factors reflect the programmatic adaptation required to deliver on the needs of the community. Despite the literature reflecting many of the similar

environmental factors found in Extension (i.e., diversification, urbanization, and technology) specific studies have not been conducted to document the organizational perspectives that are influencing organizational change in the program or the best practice strategies to respond at scale.

3. Theoretical Framework

4-H and Extension are preponderantly grassroots organizations (Selznik, 2011). Each state-level administrator provides leadership for the direction of the organization. Ronalds (2010) suggests that administrators (e.g., leaders) are the “single most critical element in . . . organizations effectively responding to the increasing complex and unpredictable challenges they face” (p. 118). Understanding how Extension administrators perceive the environmental factors are influencing the 4-H youth developments will inform and potentially improve organizational strategy; ensuring the future success of the organization.

3.1 Environmental Factors

The stability of an organization is determined by the extent to which the environment is relatively stable or if it is dynamic (Burns & Stalker, 2015; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). The environment’s stability or instability significantly affects the internal operations, structures, and policies of the organization (Burke, 2014). Duncan (1972) conducted a study of three different police departments to understand the process of organizational change in response to environmental shifts, such as changing community demographics, which at the time was causing a need for change in policing strategy. This quantitative study exposed that environmental complexity and environmental change were two separate indicators that framed the way that organizations assessed the environment’s uncertainty. Environmental change is the degree to which factors in the environment change (Slagter, 2010).

3.2 Organizational Adaptation

Administrators make decisions daily about how to develop strategies that moderate the impacts of environmental factors to the organization. How administrators understand the organization's environmental factors frames organizational strategy (Nadler & Tushman, 1977; 1980). Administrator decisions result in programmatic shifts. Shifts have impacts on the long-term ability for the organizations ability to adapt or thrive.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

A Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) Analysis is a tool for administrators of an organization to assess where the organization sits in their environment (Lamm et al., 2021; Pickton & Wright, 1998). The SWOT analysis allows for the administrator to expose the factors and issues they are facing by scanning for the many aspects of the organization in the context of the environment. SWOT Analysis considers both external (e.g., opportunity and threats) and internal (e.g., strengths and weakness) influences on the organizations ability to thrive (Namugenyi et al., 2019).

4. Methods

This study's objective is to describe the Extension administrators' perspectives on environmental factors facing 4-H youth development and expose strategies for the Extension system to apply in response to these forces. This research received approval from the Virginia Tech Internal Review Board (IRB) and approval was received prior to data collection. Consent was sought from all participants by collecting a participant's signature on a scanned consent form prior to participating in the research. The consent form was reviewed before beginning the semi-standardized interviews and before recording the interview. No compensation for

participation in the study was offered. The methodology of this study has been published in previous articles (see also [Author A]; [Author B]; [Author C]; [Author D]).

Each LGU has their own organizational charts, yet each LGU has an individual serving as the Director of Extension and State 4-H Program Leader. The lead author Googled each 1862 LGU and identified the person and contact information for each of these distinct roles. For both of these populations there are only 57 individuals to recruit, with a total population of 114. Therefore, it is important to understand that these individuals are a part of a high-profile and small population and we have taken measures to obscure their identities in the demographic data throughout – some examples include providing pseudonyms and sharing only the number of participants who have participated by region.

Individuals were invited by email to participate in this study, with three rounds of invitations having been sent. IRB also allowed for phone call follow-ups to solicit participants but phone call recruitment was not required to get adequate participation. A request was made for both State 4-H Program Leader and Extension Director to participate, however, that was not a requirement for participation. Twenty Extension administrators, including seven State Extension Directors and 13 State 4-H Program Leaders, volunteered to be interviewed (Table 1), all participants who volunteered completed their interviews.

Table 1

Participant Demographics (N=20)

Category	Options	State 4-H	State	Total
		Program Leader	Extension Director	
Gender	Male	6	5	11
	Female	7	2	9

Category	Options	State 4-H	State	Total
		Program Leader	Extension Director	
Age	18-29	0	0	0
	30-49	5	0	5
	50-64	7	5	12
	65+	1	2	3
Race/Ethnicity	White	12	7	19
	Hispanic	0	0	0
	Black	1	0	1
Years of Extension Employment	0-10	2	1	2
	11-20	7	2	9
	21-30	3	2	5
	31+	2	2	4
Highest Degree Level Earned	Bachelors	0	0	0
	Masters	1	0	1
	Doctorate	12	7	19
University Title Level	Director	11	2	13
	Department Head	1	0	1
	Dean	1	4	5
	Chancellor	0	1	1

Note. The demographic survey questions were open-ended. The options relayed in this table represent the coded qualitative responses. This table is adapted from a previously published article from these same data, [Author A].

Broad geographic regions and administrator roles by region are presented in Table 2. Participants represented 15 states and all four administrative regions of the APLU. The 15 states included in the study represented a broad

Table 2*Study Participants by APLU¹ Region and Administrative Role*

APLU¹ Region	Administrative Role	Number
North Central	State 4-H Program Leaders	3
	State Extension Directors	2
Northeast	State 4-H Program Leaders	4
	State Extension Directors	0
Southern	State 4-H Program Leaders	3
	State Extension Directors	3
Western	State 4-H Program Leaders	3
	State Extension Directors	2
Totals	State 4-H Program Leaders	13
	State Extension Directors	7

Note. ¹Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU). This table is adapted from a previously published article from these same data, [Author A].

Participants completed a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis for both Extension and the 4-H program in their state. Participants were asked to complete the analysis as a mental exercise before the interview and then during the semi-standardized interviews to reflect on their analysis.

The data collection technique for this study was a semi-standardized interview (Table 3). We chose semi-standardized interviews as the inquiry method for study participants to articulate their subjective theories and implicit assumptions (Flick, 2016). The semi-standardized interview is an inquiry method that combines a predetermined set of open questions, questions that prompt discussion, and the interviewer's opportunity to further explore a particular response and emergent themes (Charmaz, 2014). The lead author conducted one-on-one semi-standardized interviews via Zoom individually. The interviews ranged from 44 to 114 minutes.

Table 3*Interview Protocol Guide for the Research Question*

Literature	Interview Question
Environmental Factor Shifts	You were provided a fillable document prior to the interview, which is a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis asks a program manager to identify Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity, Threats for the organization. I have asked you to do this independently for both Extension and 4-H programs. Would you tell me about your SWOT analysis for the 4-H program?
Organizational Adaptation	You have identified several things on your radar in your SWOT analysis. Which of these do you think will necessitate the 4-H program to change. Why? <hr/> What is unique about this(ese) that will require change? <hr/> Looking at your SWOT analysis, thinking about organizational factors, what would you describe as a crisis for the 4-H program? <hr/> How well is the organization coping with changes in its environment over time? <hr/> How well is the organization coping with changes in its environment over time? <hr/> Please explain in your own words if the 4-H program is relevant today? Why do you say that?

The lead author prepared the data for analyzation by transcribing audio recordings verbatim. The lead author then open-coded transcripts using Atlas.ti. Open coding is a tool frequently utilized in the grounded theory approach to qualitative analysis. The term open means the researcher has not previously established a codebook. The researcher then codes each discrete piece of data with a descriptive label. To start open-coding the transcripts were prepared for line-by-line coding. Line-by-line coding refers to applying codes to each line of qualitative

data (Charmaz, 2014). The lead author established and revised code definitions as the data analysis occurred for each line of these data. To ensure consistency in code meaning, the lead researcher established the code definitions and revised code meanings throughout the analysis.

Memoing was also used by the lead author to expose researcher biases and to ensure coding reflected the participant's meaning (Blair, 2015). Memoing is the process of researcher meaning-making and reflection. Memoing occurred throughout the coding process and theme development (Charmaz, 2014). For category and theme development we grouped congruent open codes together (Williams & Moser, 2019). Additionally, we sorted categories and themes into Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats for the 4-H program using the definitions provided by Pickton and Wright (1998).

Trustworthiness is an appropriate criterion for evaluating qualitative research (Maher et al., 2018). To support trustworthiness, we employed member checking and data triangulation. We shared completed interview transcripts with each participant prior to and during data analysis to clarify participants meaning and ensure theme development accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Data triangulation refers to using multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena (Patton, 1999). It has also been argued that data triangulation is a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (Carter et al., 2014). For this study we chose two separate populations with experience with this same phenomenon to support data triangulation.

Having a clear research plan and approaching the study reflexively contributes to qualitative validity, which is congruency between the study's findings and the participant's meaning (Creswell 2014). Reflexivity is the recognition that the researchers background, culture,

and experiences shape their interpretations and the researcher must find ways to be conscious to their bias through constant and iterative reflection (Creswell 2014). To provide the reader transparency of the researcher's reflexivity statement, we include it here: all researchers in this study have had personal or professional experiences with the U.S. 1862 LGU Extension system and the 4-H program. Additionally, each author believes the U.S. Extension system and 4-H are valuable organizations with room to grow and adapt.

4.1 Limitations

Rather than being quantitatively representative as with all qualitative research, data and meaning-making these data were collected until saturation was achieved as determined by the lead author (Creswell 2014). This determination is subjective and thus these results cannot be extrapolated to represent perspectives from all of Extension, only these participants.

Additionally, the change process is temporal (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This research identifies the environmental factors of a specific time of data collection. Since 2018 when this data was collected, the entire world has gone through a global pandemic which has caused change in all aspects of our day-to-day lives. This research can only serve to inform a baseline for further research.

5. Results

The data from this study generated a list of environmental factors facing the 4-H program as perceived by State Extension Directors and State 4-H Program Leaders, these are presented first. These environmental factors are then presented through a SWOT Analysis of the 4-H program (Table 4). Then in the In response to these SWOT results, five key themes of response for 4-H youth development stood out in this study: 1) key components of the traditional club model need to be ensured in all programming conducted; 2) the need to develop a club

programming matrix to help county-level staff manage their workload; 3) that being a good partner will expand the 4-H programs capacity; 4) the need for increasing involvement of first generation youth and families; and 5) an emphasis on intentional marketing and raising awareness of the new 4-H brand.

5.1 Environmental Factors

Data are presented by code category, environmental factors that emerged from the data, and supporting data from interviews to support the code of the category, and to connect these data to why they were sorted into respective environmental factors (Table 4).

Table 4

Code Category of Factors Facing the 4-H Program Sorted by Environmental Factor with Supporting Data

Code Category	Environmental Factor		Example Supporting Data
	<i>Changing Demographics Urbanization Diversification</i>	<i>Changing Potential Clientele Engagement Expectations</i>	<i>Technology</i>
Club program is high quality positive youth development			Elizabeth – “4-H is simply a group of young people who are working on something that they have a passion [for], with a caring adult and [an] experiential learning model for the development of their head, heart, hands, and health. on a reservation joining a new club.”
Long-standing relationships	x		Ryan – “We have such strong and long-standing relationships. How do you be an innovative organization without alienating or upsetting the stakeholders that you’ve had for so many years? So, whether it is traditional agricultural companies or organizations like Grange or Farm Bureau, how do you make those opportunities available? How do you invest time in programming like photography or computer coding or expressive arts and make them understand that we’re not losing our roots as an agricultural organization?”
Strong community support – Stakeholders		x	Elizabeth – “Stakeholders in her organization have a love of [the program]. They have an investment in keeping what they know and they don’t know the 4-H program broadly. So, what I have found is that most

Code Category	Environmental Factor			Example Supporting Data
	<i>Changing Demographics</i> <i>Urbanization</i>	<i>Diversification</i>	<i>Changing Potential Clientele Engagement Expectations</i>	<i>Technology</i>
are fearful of loss				<p>of them come through the door, trying to keep what they know and what they're comfortable."</p> <p>Sarah – "Volunteers, clientele, and community members that [our employee] interacts with are really passionate folks that really want to make sure that the things they know and love about Extension continue to exist."</p>
Club model requirements limit engagement for some	x	x	x	<p>Administrators – Reducing barriers for new enrollment are needed. Some strategies that were identified were reducing the amount of enrollment paperwork, changing the membership requirements for number of meetings, educating about the program model and the language used when discussing the program, and changing the types of programs offered.</p>
Still-underserving non-white populations	x	x	x	<p>Sam – "When I run the demographics for [my state], we still disproportionately have more Caucasian white youth. If you compare that to our state demographics and we do quite well on the Hispanic audience, but [this state] is primarily a majority Hispanic population, you would expect that. We are still falling short on [serving] our tribal native American youth"</p> <p>Alfred – "We're seeing more and more Hispanic children involved in activities. We've always [had] a</p>

Code Category	Environmental Factor			Example Supporting Data
	<i>Changing Demographics</i> <i>Urbanization</i>	<i>Diversification</i>	<i>Changing Potential Clientele Engagement Expectations</i>	<i>Technology</i>
				high percentage of black children . . . participating in 4-H. We also still [have] a lot of Asian children, international kids . . . we have put some resources into Spanish [language], but I think there’s a lot more there that we can and should do.”
4-H brand is still unknown or out of sync by many	x	x	x	<p>Callie – “Our [4-H] brand hasn’t moved with the times fast enough. I think we’ve lost some youth and families from participating because of that.”</p> <p>Contributing to this is the fact that the “strongest community-based programming” is through traditional agriculture-based projects.”</p> <p>Administrators – The 4-H Clover brand as a quality youth program for “ag kids” also served as a deterrent to nonagricultural youth - primarily urban populations.</p>
Diversity in Our Communities	x	x	x	Joseph – “[One of the things] I think about every day [is the changing] demographic of urban and rural; I think it’s a big one. I think also, you know, there’s a tremendous amount more 113 English-as-a-second-language folks in this country. And, particularly Latino audiences are continually growing.”
Urban centers have more service	x			Timothy – “In urban counties, there’s more competition out there, especially in youth development.”

Code Category	Environmental Factor		Example Supporting Data
	<i>Changing Demographics</i> <i>Urbanization</i>	<i>Changing Potential Clientele Engagement Expectations</i>	<i>Technology</i>
provider competition			Curt – “There’re many other youth groups that are competing for similar dollars. I’m often just shell-shocked as I look at . . . some legislation that gives hundreds of thousands of dollars to a group, and I think, “We’re doing that. Why didn’t we get that money?” So, there’s a lot . . . we’re competing for.”
Urban audiences do not know about agriculture	x		Alfred – “The farther and farther [urban audiences] get away from the farm, the less we understand about where our food and fiber comes from.” Robert – “We need to increase that urban presence and look at how we approach those audiences differently. [Urban communities] are really where [the] opportunities are, because we are often the only game in town in regards to Agriculture.”
Partnerships with fellow organizations			x Timothy – “The thing that is interesting is, when the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs do programming in a lot of these areas, it’s the Extension people going, or they want to . . . copy the Extension after-school programs and youth programs to bring in there.”
High tech and high touch		x	x Elizabeth -- We have been trying to test online learning as it relates to 4-H learning opportunities. Technology is always changing, and how people want to engage with technology continues to change.

Code Category	Environmental Factor	Example Supporting Data
<p><i>Changing Demographics</i> <i>Urbanization</i> <i>Diversification</i></p>	<p><i>Changing Potential Clientele Engagement Expectations</i></p>	<p><i>Technology</i></p>
		<p>Ryan – “Youth are more comfortable with technology, but if you’re designing a program to go [to an Urban community] with socioeconomic issues there’s no guarantee they have a computer, there’s no guarantee they have a cell phone, there’s no guarantee they have Internet access, and it’s probably not safe for them to go to a location in the evening to have access to those things. So how do we integrate technology and [4-H] and make sure both remain relevant and effective and not take this approach that technology can replace everything?”</p>

5.2 SWOT Analysis

The authors sorted each of the Categories into a discrete Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, or Threat category for the 4-H program, the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 4

Factors Influencing the 4-H Program Described by Extension Administrators

	Positive Factors	Negative Factors
Internal Factors	<u>Strengths</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Club program is high-quality positive youth development ▪ Strong community support ▪ Long-standing relationships 	<u>Weaknesses</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Club model requirements limit engagement for some ▪ Still underserving non-white populations ▪ 4-H brand is still unknown or out of sync by many ▪ Technology
External Factors	<u>Opportunity</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urban audiences do not know about Agriculture ▪ Partnership with fellow organizations ▪ Diversity in Our Communities 	<u>Threat</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Competition in urban environments ▪ Stakeholders are fearful of loss

Note. To learn about the results for the Extension SWOT Analysis refer to [Author D].

5.3 Response

In response to the described Environmental Factors and SWOT results, five key themes of response for 4-H youth development stood out in this study: 1) key components of the traditional club model need to be ensured in all programming conducted; 2) the need to develop a club programming matrix to help county-level staff manage their workload; 3) that being a good partner will expand the 4-H programs capacity; 4) the need for increasing involvement of first generation youth and families; and 5) an emphasis on intentional marketing and raising awareness of the new 4-H brand.

5.3.1 Theme 1. Key components of the traditional club model need to be ensured in all programming conducted

Administrators recognize the premier value of the traditional community club model but also recognized the traditional club model may not be the ideal point of service for all youth. Administrators each had varying levels of commitment to a statewide program approach. 4-H participation experiences are not all created equal. Administrators recognized that the community club model has efficacy for making positive impacts on young people. For example, administrators referred to the work by Arnold (2018) to establish the 4-H Thrive Model.

5.3.2 Theme 2. The need to develop a club programming matrix

4-H program leaders used the phrase “variety of approaches” to describe the different ways that a youth could participate in the 4-H program model. They recognized that there were different levels of participation and that different levels of participation were right for different youth—not all youth want to participate in a community club for ten or more years. Rather, they realized the 4-H program needs to provide a variety of experiences focused on delivering the Positive Youth Development (PYD) model. When we think about the essence of 4-H, not simply as a club, Elizabeth shared:

It helps us to think broader about what our possibilities are—the glory of the 4-H program [is] that you can use any instrument and any content area to organize and do 4-H. 4-H is simply a group of young people who are working on something that they have a passion [for], with a caring adult and [an] experiential learning model for the development of their head, heart, hands, and health. It was also emphasized by a majority of state 4-H program leaders that the emphasis should be on encouraging youth to move from the lower-engagement activity into the more complex model of engagement. It was emphasized that, throughout their experiences, the youth and their families must be aware that they are participating in a 4-H and Extension program. Reducing barriers for new

enrollment. The need to create pathways for involvement by new members was recognized. Some strategies that were identified were reducing the amount of enrollment paperwork, changing the membership requirements for number of meetings, educating about the program model and the language used when discussing the program, and changing the types of programs offered. More than any specific change, this represents a shift in the focus of the organization to “first generation youth,” a term used by Elizabeth to communicate a strategy to help orient volunteers and staff toward helping youth be successful, whether it is a youth member entering a livestock project for the first time or a native youth member on a reservation joining a new club.

David said of this about first-generation youth:

So, I think it’s being more comfortable, and I’m clear on what we are and something we maybe took for granted in the past. People just knew about us, and it was generational.

We have to think about first generation 4-H members and families and communities and how do we position our program and overcome the barriers to participation for those folks.

David identified that when the 4-H program cannot rely on generational knowledge of the organization, then the organization needs to be more intentional about outreach to make sure youth are willing, and able, to join.

5.3.3. Theme 3. Being a good partner will expand the 4-H programs capacity

Partnerships were recognized as increasingly valuable for delivering programming across all youth serving organizations (e.g., schools, competing youth organizations, not-for-profits).

Instead of being in competition with other youth-serving organizations, providing quality curriculum and youth development expertise expands our program reach. Timothy talked about the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs wanting to serve youth but seeking out 4-H for programming (see

Table 3). If a mutually beneficial partnership is developed, that would be a transformational expansion of 4-H membership as youth participate in 4-H designed curriculum through their service providers.

5.3.4. Theme 4. Need to increase involvement by first-generation youth and families

Administrators recognized that nonwhite youth still participated in the traditional community club model at lower rates than white youth members. There is an important point of reflection in the turn toward new programming areas to obtain a demographically representative membership: Have nonwhite youth experienced an equally strong positive youth development experience through participation in short-term 4-H programs compared to predominantly white youth who continue to populate the traditional community club?

5.3.5. Theme 5. Emphasize intentional marketing and raising awareness of the current 4-H brand

Administrators recognized that the strength of the 4-H Clover brand as a quality youth program for “ag kids” also served as a deterrent to nonagricultural youth - primarily urban populations. Administrators communicated challenges from their internal stakeholders who feared the loss of resources and programs when nonagricultural programming was promoted, which linked to a limitation of being able to shift the brand to serve the larger number of youths residing in nonagricultural communities. Administrators identified a barrier for non-agriculture (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban) youth to joining 4-H programs was their perception that 4-H was an agricultural organization, thus providing a significant deterrent to membership expansion. Callie captured this sentiment when she shared that “our [4-H] brand hasn’t moved with the times fast enough, and so I think we’ve lost some youth and families from participating because of that.” Contributing to this is the fact that the “strongest community-based programming” is

through traditional agriculture-based projects. Joseph shared that “the traditional historical frame of doing great 4-H work is . . . its great livestock programs.” Additionally, animal projects are showcased at county fairs, which in rural and suburban communities are large community events that are most significant in raising awareness of the program. Rhonda said:

Fairs are great opportunities for us. They [are] huge community events and in rural communities in particular, [they are] probably the largest events in the community for the entire year. So, it affords great visibility, but we have to be demonstrating . . . how we’re changing our programming moving forward.

Efforts to move the marketing away from agriculture to be more inclusive is recognized as being essential. Yet, moving the brand towards positive youth development and inclusivity poses the possibility of backlash from internal stakeholders.

6. Discussion

Five themes emerged from this studies data: Theme 1. Key components of the traditional club model need to be ensured in all programming conducted; Theme 2. The need to develop a club programming matrix; Theme 3. Being a good partner will expand the 4-H programs capacity; Theme 4. Need to increase involvement by first-generation youth and families ; and Theme 5. Emphasize intentional marketing and raising awareness of the current 4-H brand. Administrators recognized that the community club model had the most ability to make positive impacts on young people because of this idea of the greatest level of treatment which is an emerging idea from the 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold, 2018), yet, not all 4-H experiences are created equal. Several administrators talked about making sure that the aspects of the community club experience were embedded in the special interest project or camp or school enrichment to ensure accessibility to the 4-H program by first-generation 4-H youth members. There has not

been research conducted to assess what benefits those given aspects have on the overall outcomes from youth participation in each of the given areas. Research will need to be conducted to examine how these components influence a youth's experience as the emphasis on shorter-term experiences increases.

Looking at Borden et al.'s (2014) recommendation for 4-H youth development organizational adaptation, 4-H is focused on many of the environmental factors of urbanization, demographic changes, and technology. The administrator perspectives do reflect Borden et al.'s (2014) recommendations, including a focus on program quality elements, partnerships for programmatic success, and adapting to changing technological requirements by clients. Administrators discussed in a report of all of Cooperative extension's environmental factors that strong evaluation efforts would be required for successful response to a change in the public value equation for all of Extension, and 4-H included ([Author A]; Elliott-Engel et al., under review). Yet, it is clear that Extension administrators focus on environmental factors is increasingly focused on grappling with the mission change tension, between being a rural serving organization and serving all audiences, the changes in demographics, and less about the change on how youth want to engage with the organization.

Administrators recognized that nonwhite youth still participated in the traditional community club model at lower rates than white students. There is an important point of reflection in the turn toward new programming areas to obtain a demographically representative membership: Have nonwhite youth experienced an equally strong positive youth development experience through participation in short-term 4-H programs compared to predominantly white youth who continue to populate the traditional community club? And, has the 4-H program

served minority populations well if they have not achieved parity within the traditional 4-H club program?

It was recognized that staffing levels are low and that the programming need is large. Staff only have so much capacity. In order to balance those two aspects, some administrators emphasized that their county-level staff should be focusing on direct teaching because those administrators felt that staff model could achieve maximum capacity of youth served. While other administrators proposed a county-level programming matrix that remained focused on the traditional club model—either in-school or out-of-school club models—and also included a few key large-scale activities that engaged in another delivery mode, for example, in-school, after-school, special interest project clubs, or camps. The emphasis on this programming model balanced maintaining the higher-impact traditional club model, which is going to reach a smaller portion of the population, with reaching a larger population with high-quality educational experiences. Administrators did not talk explicitly about using those programming areas as a recruitment strategy. They did, however, view them as important ways to market the program by emphasizing aspects of the brand to larger audiences.

Partnerships were recognized as increasingly valuable for delivering programming. Instead of being in competition with other youth-serving organizations, providing quality curriculum and youth development expertise expands our program reach. Timothy talked about the Boys' and Girls' Clubs wanting to serve youth but seeking out 4-H for programming. If a mutually beneficial partnership is developed, that would be a transformational expansion of 4-H membership as youth participate in 4-H designed curriculum through their service providers. There continue to be opportunities to rethink the roles of 4-H staff delivering 4-H content. First generation strategy. This strategy involves reducing barriers and being service oriented to

support families who do not have generational experience with 4-H. Yet Borden et al., (2014) saw partnerships as a way to support youth leadership and connect youth to their community rather than serving as a capacity building strategy for the organization.

Several administrators talked about reframing the recruitment experience for 4-H as a first-generation strategy. To them, this meant that there was intentionality around helping new families understand what 4-H is and how it operates in an effort to get them in the door and keep them in the program. This was a strategy to increase 4-H membership from racial minority, urban, and rural populations. The use of first generation was intentional so as not to be “othering,” either to the minority youth populations who were being sought or to the traditional 4-H club families who are the base of the program.

Marketing is important for attracting youth and families to the 4-H program and for ensuring that youth who participate in 4-H experiences outside of the traditional 4-H club are aware that they are welcome to have a 4-H experience. In order to attract first-generation youth to the program, marketing needs to be clear about how individuals can get involved, the mission and purpose of the organization, and reduce barriers for participation. Additionally, youth and families need to understand that they are 4-H members or that they have had a 4-H experience when they are participating in a matrix of 4-H programming (i.e., camping program, after-school program, in-school program, or school enrichment program). It is imperative that 4-H alumni are aware that they are still 4-H alumni even if they participated in a 4-H mode of delivery other than a traditional 4-H club, especially as the 4-H program moves away from a traditional club model. Particularly when thinking about reaching out to minority populations, this may become the strategy for engaging those first-generation club members in the future, once they begin to have children and remember their 4-H experiences.

7. Conclusions

While the data is reflective of one youth development organization, it also provides an opportunity for transparency for youth-development organizations across the country at multiple levels to see and recognize similar challenges a large national youth development organization face. The specific issues likely differ by scope and scale of the organization, but similarities and themes likely exist across youth development organizations.

As was mentioned in the limitations these data were collected in 2018. Since then the world has experienced a global pandemic that has forced every person and organization to grapple with significant change and the fallout that results from a global seismic shift. These data could be viewed as obsolete, yet, they provide a vantage point and census marker for where the 4-H youth development program understood itself at one period time. And, allows for researchers, administrators, and programmatic staff an opportunity to assess the progress of the organization.

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