

Career Development for Teens Through the Southern Virginia Workforce Readiness and Preparedness Summit

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Abstract

A 2019 needs assessment distributed by the Pittsylvania County unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension indicates that professional development is among the top five priority issues for youth in the county. Despite an economics and personal finance course being a requirement for all Virginia public high school students, youth still do not receive adequate exposure to the elements of career readiness before graduation. Using the experiential learning model as the foundation, this project aims to immerse high school students in a non-traditional classroom environment to learn and develop soft skills such as a proper handshake, the importance of eye contact when communicating, the value of networking, and a general overview of proper etiquette. Additional project goals include teaching students how to write resumes and cover letters, how to prepare for a variety of interview styles, and how to present themselves as polished professionals. An evaluation of this program indicated that participants feel more prepared for their futures/careers, know what to expect in an interview, know how to write a resume, have improved their communication skills, and have learned how to dress professionally.

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## Introduction

### Background and Setting

Pittsylvania County, located in southern Virginia, is an agricultural hub with deep historical roots in tobacco. Aside from its tobacco heritage, the county boasts a strong appeal to healthy lifestyles and a focus on the development of youth to become contributing adult citizens. In 2015, the census listed Pittsylvania County as home to an estimated 62,000 individuals. Of that 62,000, 19.9% were youth under the age of 18. These youth make up the future of the county and surrounding region and, therefore, serve as an excellent population in which to invest.

A youth organization that focuses heavily on the acquisition of life skills is 4-H, which in Pittsylvania County operates through Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE); a state agency. The overall mission of VCE is to deliver and/or provide research-based information to diverse clients. Moreover, the role of a 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent requires the ability to provide leadership for 4-H Youth Development programs that meet the needs of all youth. Furthermore, agents should identify, recruit, train, support, and manage volunteers to carry out educational unit programming, determine unit program needs by monitoring trends, issues, and unit assessments, and coordinate day-to-day activities and events associated with the unit 4-H program. These delivery modes include clubs, projects, camps, special interest events, and school enrichment initiatives.

Local discussions among business leaders and area representatives led to a consensus that regional employers are “concerned about their talent pipeline” (J. Brown, personal communication, July 22, 2014). In an effort to ensure future employees for these regional businesses, the Career ChoICE Expo was developed by a group of concerned employees from the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research in Danville, VA. Career ChoICE is an event that is “modeled after Southwest Alabama’s Worlds of Opportunity...[and] exposes students to hands-on activities by inspirational adults to ignite students’ imaginations to unlimited career opportunities in Southern Virginia” (Vernon, 2014). Throughout this event, students are not only given the opportunity to explore the diversity of career availability in the SOVA region, but they also have the chance to interact and engage with the actual employers. This exposure to job opportunities allows for students to align their education with the career path of their choice.

Through conversation with local parents, teachers, and employers, the consensus is that youth need more exposure to career development practices. That was further supported by the 2019 needs assessment, known as the Situation Analysis, for the Pittsylvania County unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension. This needs assessment was distributed to teachers and administrators within the Pittsylvania County Public School System as well as to teachers and administrators of local private schools. Each group of stakeholders identify the continuity of teaching life skills to youth as being of high importance (Pittsylvania County Situation Analysis, 2018). In addition, the Situation Analysis highlights the value of preparing youth for their futures, both financially and socially.

The current drive from the local economy is to keep Pittsylvania County graduates close to home to boost the regional economy. In an effort to make that happen, youth not only need exposure to potential careers in the area (via Career ChoICE), but they also need to develop soft skills such as

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handshaking, eye contact, and effective communication (both verbal and nonverbal) to excel in the workforce. In an effort to expand upon the groundwork already laid by Career ChoICE, the Southern Virginia Workforce Readiness and Preparedness (SOVA WRAP) Summit comes into play.

As stated in the logic model for this program (Appendix Resource 1), the SOVA WRAP Summit will reach students in grades 9-12 to teach them how to perfect the business handshake, improve eye contact when communicating, and write a resume and cover letter. The planning, implementation, and evaluation of the newly created and piloted SOVA WRAP Summit will be used to bridge the gap between local programming efforts. For while Career ChoICE previews career options, SOVA WRAP shows students how to obtain them. As such, it is the long-term goal of the agent to collaborate with the Career ChoICE program planners to reach the same population through the SOVA WRAP program. In doing so, this could not only help meet the needs of the economy, but could aid in the fulfillment of program objectives of Pittsylvania County 4-H and its stakeholders.

### Statement of the Problem

Soft skills surrounding interview preparation and general professionalism are not targeted at the level in which it is beneficial to students. Experiential learning opportunities involving interaction between high school aged youth and area specialists on the topic of career development will increase preparedness in participants for their future careers. Vision: Youth will graduate high school with more experience in professionalism and interview preparation which in turn sets them up for better success in the workforce and makes them stronger candidates for local employment.

### Significance of the Problem

Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) require all public high school students in Virginia to successfully complete an Economics and Personal Finance course prior to graduation (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). Within the framework of this standard are seventeen objectives for students to achieve. Compared to the average of nine objectives in other required courses, Economics and Personal Finance instructors have a significant amount of content to fit into the high school years.

### Purpose of the Project

Students who are unexposed to best career development practices are weak candidates for employment opportunities. Theoretically, students who are exposed to this material in high school still have time to develop career readiness strategies and be on the right track for employment opportunities by the time they graduate. Thus, the 2019 SOVA WRAP summit will be held as a pilot program in hopes of kick-starting a long-term career development program for Pittsylvania County high school students. The goal of the project is to immerse high school students in an educational, yet fun, career development opportunity. During such, local youth engage with area specialists in the field of Career Development from the University of Lynchburg to accomplish the following:

- a. Define workforce readiness

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- b. Share basic rules of etiquette
- c. Identify the expectations of a job resume
- d. Compare and contrast chronological and content-based resumes
- e. Recognize the information that should be included in a cover letter
- f. Identify the steps to take in preparing for a professional interview
- g. Articulate the differences between casual, business-casual, and professional attire
- h. Discover the process of networking
- i. Relate personal networking abilities to professional networking opportunities
- j. Design and/or modify a personal career development plan to meet career goals

To gauge achievement of the aforementioned objectives, researcher observations are noted and two forms of evaluation are distributed during the SOVA WRAP summit. One format of the evaluation is distributed at the end of each session during the summit to provide feedback on the presenter and the presenter's content. The second format is distributed at the conclusion of the summit to evaluate the summit as a whole and seek feedback on what participants gained as a result of attending. Such input allows the researcher to know the level at which program efforts meet the needs of its participants.

### Project Objectives

Objective 1: Identify common career development needs among Pittsylvania County public high school students.

Objective 2: Design a one-day career development summit for Pittsylvania County public high school students that addresses student needs as indicated by observation and community input.

Objective 3: Connect area career development specialists with student participants

Objective 4: Obtain evaluative feedback from student participants and school officials

### Definition of Terms

4-H: A community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills

Hard Skills: Teachable abilities or skill sets that are easily quantifiable (Ex: reading, writing, math, computer skills) (Doyle, Heathfield, & McKay, 2017)

Situation Analysis: A needs assessment created by unit offices of Virginia Cooperative Extension that is distributed to community members every five years; results guide unit programming efforts

Soft Skills: Interpersonal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people (Ex: etiquette, communication, teamwork) (Doyle, Heathfield, & McKay, 2017)

## Review of Literature

### Introduction

To be prepared means to be ready for use or consideration. According to a study from Bentley University (2013) “young people are facing a more difficult path from college to careers than any generation in decades” (p. 3). Could this be due to a lack of preparedness? Are schools providing adequate opportunities for students to be ready for the workforce? John Wooden, former NBA player and UCLA Head Coach states, “Failure to prepare is preparing to fail.” To foster the development of desirable employee traits, educators and students, alike, need to realize that workforce readiness and preparedness is a priority issue.

The Bentley study (2013) illustrates the varying definitions of preparedness between business decision makers, corporate recruiters, high school students, and college students. Roughly 25% of business decision makers and approximately 22% of corporate recruiters believe that preparedness is defined as work ethic and personal traits such as adaptability, maturity, and a good attitude. Alternatively, high school and college students simply view preparedness in a general sense.

### Relevance

Years ago, a high school diploma was all you needed to be successful in the job market. However, a Georgetown study revealed that is no longer the case in today’s society. This study states that the percentage of jobs in the United States that require some form of postsecondary education will reach a projected 63% by 2018, up from 28% in the early 1970’s (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010).

Additionally, Harvard University representative, Tony Wagner, shares that students need skills including adaptability, critical thinking, imagination, and entrepreneurship to aid in their success in today’s economy (Wagner, 2010). He later explains that the teaching of these skills is widely underemphasized in public instruction and assessments within American schools and that youth have few opportunities to develop such skills in school settings (Wagner, 2010). Brand and Valent’s (2014) research shows that there is a strong evidence base that supports “deploying afterschool and summer programs and partnerships to develop students’ readiness skills for enrolling in postsecondary education and for joining the workforce” (p. 3). Thus, serving as the ideal stepping stone for 4-H involvement and the acquisition of life skills.

### Rationale

As previously stated, the purpose of SOVA WRAP is to expand upon the ground work that the regional SOVA Career ChoICE event has laid. Career ChoICE gives students the opportunity to explore career options within the region while SOVA WRAP teaches the skills needed to be successful in the occupation each student pursues.

A similar program to SOVA WRAP is the “RU Ready for Work” which is based out of New Jersey. This program highlights teens in the workforce. Research from this program states, “Employment among teens has been declining over the past decade, falling from 45% in 2000 to 26% in 2010” (Hill, Summey, & Devance, 2014, p. 6). Given the variance in structure from Career ChoICE (once annually) to RU Ready for Work (extended annual program), the evaluative results

are tracked differently. According to results from the RU Ready to Work program, the participating class of 2013-2014 yielded two valedictorians, one salutatorian, and a 100% enrollment rate of program graduates into post-secondary education (Hill et. al., 2014).

The RU Ready for Work program mirrors the expectations of SOVA WRAP in that students participate in an educational program targeted at developing their professional skills and are able to establish themselves in a positive career setting. Additionally, SOVA WRAP serves as an ideal continuation of the Career ChoICE program offered on a regional level. Career ChoICE introduces youth to the job opportunities in the SOVA region while the purpose of SOVA WRAP is to aid youth in the development of both hard and soft skills needed to be successful in the career paths they choose. Given the similarities of SOVA WRAP to existing programs and events throughout the United States, information and statistics gained from this study will serve supplemental to existing research.

A 2012 study identifies the implications of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education taught through afterschool methods by individuals in specific STEM-related fields (Lyon, Jafri, & St. Louis, 2012). Program researchers aim to identify students who are often overlooked by the generalized populations targeted by STEM education. Lyons, et. al. (2012) states, “Meaningful work with scientists and long-term relationships with caring adults were critical factors in students’ decisions to persist in Project Exploration and in STEM” (p. 50). By offering these students a tailored experience to meet their needs, the afterschool method of learning is believed to be impactful. While the subject matter for this study is different from that of the current SOVA WRAP study, the underlying theoretical framework and design still suggests that these nontraditional classroom settings are beneficial to the youth participants.

The evaluative goal of SOVA WRAP is to provide insight to the success rate of student participants as they venture into their chosen career field. Results should determine the effectiveness of the program. Additionally, results should support the idea that supplementary attention to career development subject matter outside of a traditional classroom setting is beneficial to the learning and application experiences for participants.

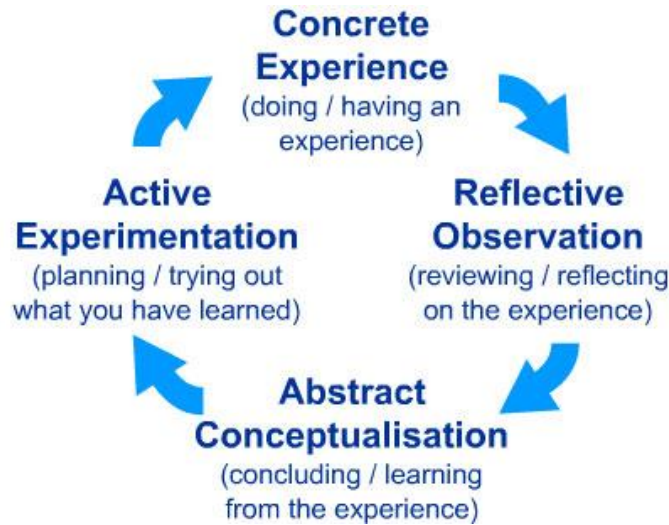
### Theoretical Framework

Experiential Education is defined as “a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people’s capacity to contribute to their communities” (Association for Experiential Education, 2016). In addition, Experiential Education fosters an environment where students actively engage in “posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning” (Association for Experiential Education, 2016). In essence, participation in hands-on learning opportunities with reflection theoretically aids in an individual’s ability to comprehend and contribute more effectively to their communities. However, Experiential Learning does not simply stop with the initial experience.

In 1984, David Kolb published the Experiential Learning Model seen in Figure 1 (McLeod, 2013). Much of Kolb’s method is centered on an individual’s cognitive processes, and as seen below, is

typically represented by four main stages: 1) Concrete Experience (doing/having an experience) 2) Reflective Observation (reviewing/reflecting on the experience) 3) Abstract Conceptualization (concluding/learning from the experience) and 4) Active Experimentation (planning/trying out what you have learned).

Figure 1 (McLeod, 2013)



Kolb's Model is designed in such a way that each stage can smoothly transition into the next and be equally beneficial to the overall learning experience. An individual may enter the cognitive process at any of the stages depicted in Figure 1 and still reap educational benefit (McLeod, 2013). However, Kolb believes that in order to obtain the most effective learning experience, the steps in his model should be followed from beginning to end.

Similarly, the nationally recognized Experiential Learning Model used within 4-H is depicted in Figure 2. In this model, there are five steps: 1) Experience 2) Share 3) Process 4) Generalize 5) Apply.

*Experience: Youth explore a new idea at their own pace; interactive observation.*

*Share: Youth share their observations with peers and facilitators; comparison of observations.*

*Process: Youth engage in deeper conversation, incorporating theories and methods; analysis of observations.*

*Generalize: Youth connect observations to actual events; relating observations.*

*Apply: Youth incorporate new findings and life-skills into their own personal experiences; applying observations.*

Figure 2 (University of Delaware, 2016)

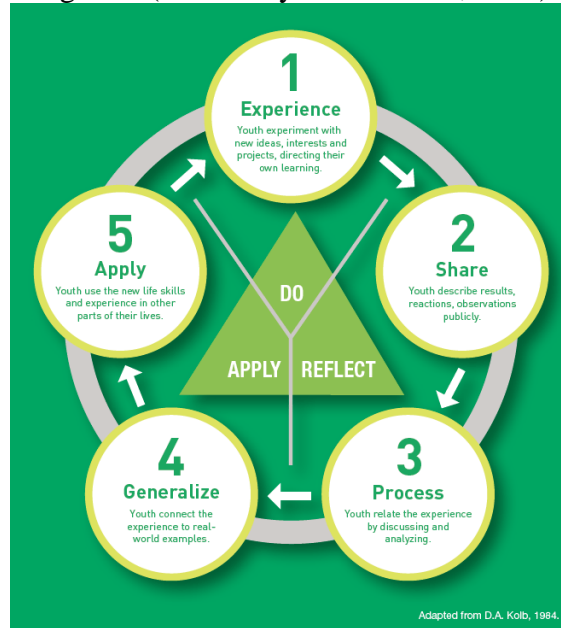
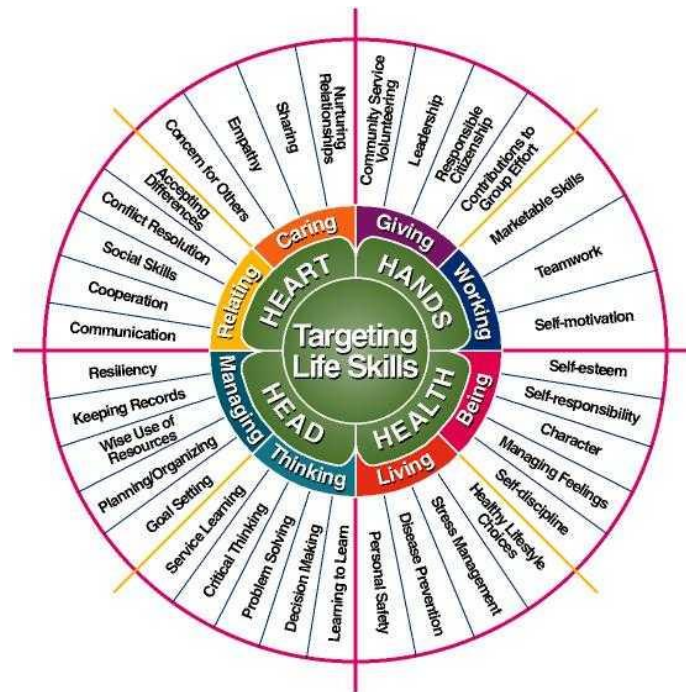


Figure 2 illustrates slight adaptations from Kolb’s Model and restructures similar concepts to be more youth-centered. While concepts remain synonymous, the steps have been slightly adjusted/separated into a more conceptualized framework making it easier for agents to incorporate into the 4-H curriculum design.

The 4-H slogan is, “learn by doing.” While the primary focus of 4-H programming is on experiential and hands-on learning, the underlying ultimate purpose is to teach life skills. The experiential learning model adapted from Kolb highlights life skills in the “Apply” section and provides the perfect window of opportunity for agents to take the model one step farther and include certain life skills developed or strengthened throughout each program.

The Targeting Life Skills Model (Figure 3) is what Virginia currently uses as a reference point for teaching specific skills. The model illustrates the core of the 4-H program (Head, Heart, Hands, and Health) and relates each of the four H’s to a specific characteristic (Caring, Working, Living, Managing, etc.). The outer wheel represents detailed life skills related to the inner circle of characteristics (Concern for Others, Self-Responsibility, Resiliency, Contributions to a Group Effort, etc.).

Figure 3 (University of Iowa, 1999)



Once the Experiential Learning Model has been utilized through Step Five, program facilitators are able to point to the Targeting Life Skills Model and highlight specific hard and soft skills youth should be able to apply to future experiences.

### Supporting Research

In a study examining the readiness of incoming employees, researchers wanted to gain a better understanding of the range of skills (both academic and non) needed for today’s workforce (Casner-Lotto, 2006). This comprehensive study shows that high school students need improvements in writing, reading comprehension, and math. In addition, they need to improve on their critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration skills. Moreover, their professionalism and work ethic are lacking. Casner-Lotto’s (2006) results also report deficiencies in leading abilities of college students, all of which are inherently basic skills.

The same study explains, “Employer respondents were asked to indicate which basic knowledge and applied skill areas they rate as ‘not important,’ ‘important’ or ‘very important’ for new entrants’ successful job performance” (Casner-Lotto, 2006, p. 17). Casner-Lotto (2006) found that as an individual’s education background increases, the expectation of acquired skills similarly increases.

Later in the study, researchers conducted a survey to determine 1) the amount of employers who offer remedial and/or on-the-job training in an effort to address skill deficiencies, and 2) the amount of employers who hire applicants despite deficiencies. Findings report, “Forty-eight percent of employer respondents say they test or otherwise screen recent high school and college graduate applicants to determine proficiency in some specific basic knowledge/skills” (Casner-

Lotto, 2006, p. 45). In the instance of hiring despite deficiencies, the study states, “Thirty-nine percent report they do not hire the applicant, while 58.1 percent report they ‘sometimes’ hire the applicant, and 2.7 percent say they hire the applicant” (Casner-Lotto, 2006, p. 45). However, of those surveyed, only about a third provide remedial basic skills training to bring recent graduates up to expectations in the workforce. Thus, creating a gap of recent graduates who are un-skilled and subsequently unemployed.

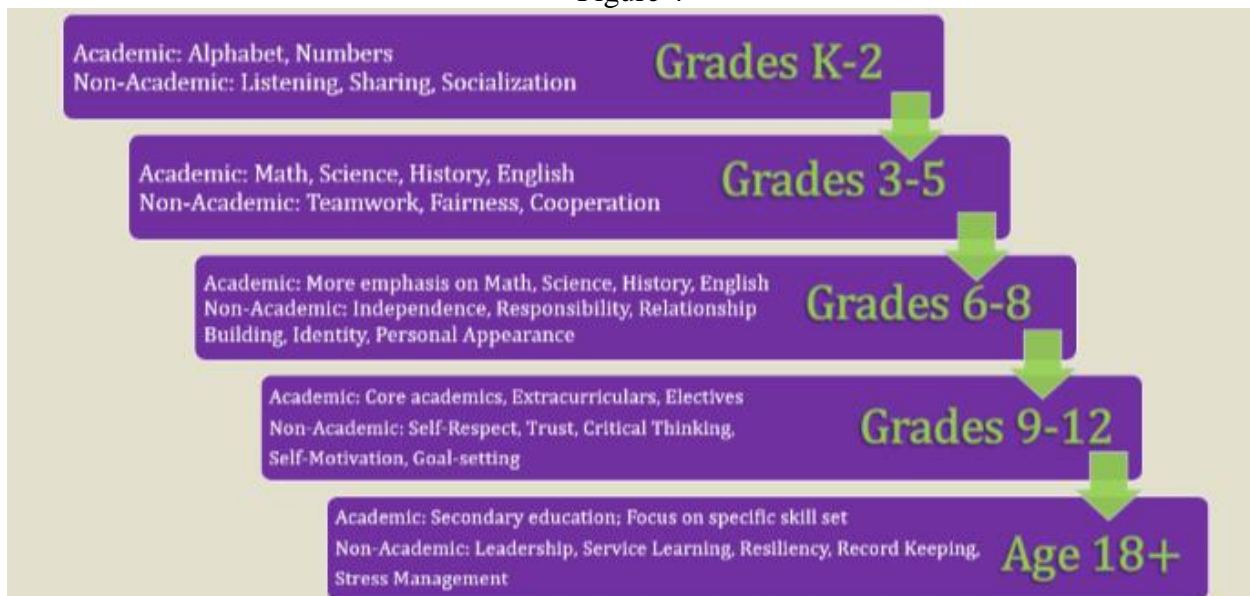
Lastly, Casner-Lotto’s (2006) study discusses who should take responsibility for the teaching of these skills. The results are as follows:

*“Three-quarters (75.6 percent) of employer respondents say that K-12 schools should be responsible for providing the necessary basic knowledge and applied skills for their new entrants. Over two-thirds (68.4 percent) say four-year colleges and universities, and 45.2 percent select two-year colleges among their top three choices. Half of the employer respondents (49.7 percent) say workforce readiness is the responsibility of the new entrants themselves.” (p. 54).*

In addition to these results, “parents” was also written in under the “other” section of this survey so as to reference parents as the responsible parties to teach the necessary skills.

Research indicates that there are a multitude of projects, events, and programs in action across the United States that aid in the teaching of career development skills to youth. There are an array of consistencies across the available studies, first of which is the age at which youth begin learning the appropriate skills for success in the workplace. Figure 4 highlights the academic and non-academic subject matter and skill sets that students learn at each grade level.

Figure 4



At age five, which is the common age of kindergarten students, youth begin learning basic academic and non-academic skills. Examples of academic skills at this age include practicing the alphabet and numbers as well as learning to write and form letters correctly. Non-academic skills

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learned at this age include sharing, social interaction, and listening skills. As youth advance through their structured educational experiences, their skill sets continue to expand.

As youth enter elementary schools, their learning experiences are broadened. Specifically, in the state of Virginia, students begin taking standardized tests in public school settings. These tests are based on the academic subjects of mathematics, science, history, and English. Given the value that statewide administrators have placed on these standardized tests, there is a heavy emphasis on the teaching of those academic skills that starts around the age of 10. Despite the emphasis on academia, these structured subjects also enable the development of non-academic skills such as teamwork, cooperation, and fairness.

Once youth progress to middle school, their education is still dependent upon the structure of the standardized tests. Thus, there is still a heavy emphasis on academia. However, between the ages of 11-14, youth are also growing in their need for independence and responsibility. Youth of this age group thrive on relationship building and the development of a sense of identity and are also placing more value on hygiene and personal care/appearance.

Further, as students enter the high school setting, academic involvement becomes more tailored to the direction of students' futures. Typically, by age 15-18, students have a general idea of what field they are interested in pursuing with regard to a career. Students are still expected to focus on the academic side of skills, however, there is more freedom to decide on extracurricular activities and elective classes. This age is also a time when youth are practicing their respect toward themselves and others, are developing a sense of trust between their peers and parents, and are utilizing critical thinking skills. Moreover, they are illustrating a need for positive role models, self-motivation, and goal setting/planning skills.

Lastly, once students graduate and/or have reached the age of 18, they are experiencing a wide array of options regarding their futures. Postsecondary education is identified as being a necessity for success in today's society. Whether in a college or university setting, a technical education setting, or on-the-job training, the 18-24 year old age range still remains a target for both academic and non-academic skills. Moreover, combining the two skill sets they have developed since the age of five and putting them into practice is now of top priority. However, that does not mean that these individuals are not still learning and gaining practical skills. Examples include leadership, service learning, resiliency, keeping records, and stress management.

Throughout each stage of learning, the synchronicity of the adapted Kolb's Model (Figure 2) is visible. In this model, youth begin by experiencing, continue on to share, transition to process and generalize, and finally apply their experiences. Relate that to the grand picture of youth development and see that the model is equally practical. Between the ages of 5-8, youth begin experiencing. As they advance in age, they begin to share their experiences. By middle school, youth are processing and generalizing their experiences. Finally, in high school, youth are applying their knowledge and experience to other aspects of their lives.

After examining the research from a youth development perspective, it is clear that middle school and/or early high school is an optimal starting place for teaching the basic skills needed for success in the workforce. This is not to discount the skills learned at an earlier age, but rather to

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acknowledge the state of development for most students at the standard middle school/early high school age.

There is not much time left to incorporate the basic life skills needed for successful employment given that schools are expected to teach academic subjects for standardized testing requirements. By utilizing the resources that the Pittsylvania County 4-H program and Virginia Cooperative Extension have to offer, teachers and administrators have no more need to feel overwhelmed or pressed for time as they try to squeeze in both topics at the same time. Providing SOVA WRAP to students in Pittsylvania County eases the stress on teachers in local classrooms while also providing the 4-H Extension Agent the opportunity to educate and help youth achieve success in a world where workforce readiness and preparedness is a priority issue.

## Project Overview

### Design

SOVA WRAP is designed such that high school students are immersed in a new environment with their peers to engage in a free, structured learning experience in a non-traditional classroom setting. While advertised as a workshop, participation is viewed as a field trip to the students. Thus, hosting the event during a regular school day helps keep the focus of the students while also providing them with a learning experience outside of their standard classroom setting. The event is designed to follow the Experiential Learning Model in which students experience, share, process, generalize, and apply the information they learn through the program to their everyday experiences. Given the nature of the content presented, SOVA WRAP participants are requested to wear business-casual attire. This request fosters the creation of a professional setting with a more casual take on the presentation of information.

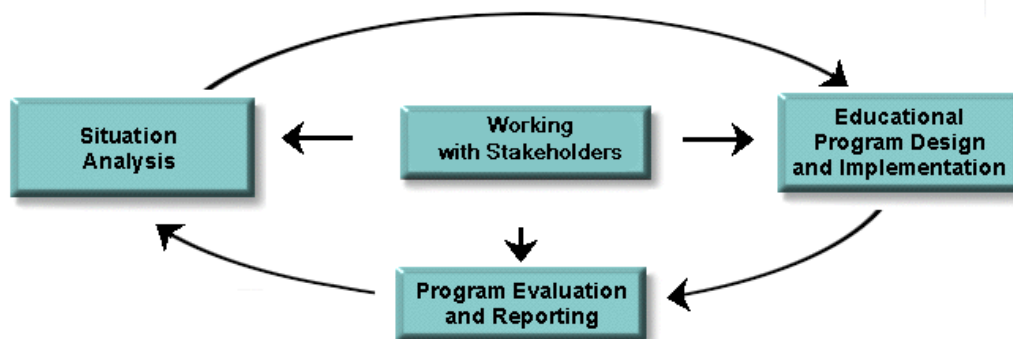
Through this learning method, and with a programming budget of \$2,000.00 (funded by a local stakeholder), facilitators are able to offer students the opportunity to better prepare themselves for the workforce by learning how to write a resume and cover letter, prepare for an interview, network and properly shake hands, and present themselves professionally.

Throughout an approximated five-hour timeframe, participants receive content from a variety of sources that include, but are not limited to state and national 4-H curriculum, area university curriculum, and personal experiences from local specialists. Content is delivered by individuals from outside of the school system so that students are hearing valid information from another source. In addition to exposure to new concepts and skills sets, students also leave the program with a pen and a professional padfolio to use during future interviews.

### Methodology

SOVA WRAP was designed with the VCE Programming Model (Figure 5) in mind. “The programming process includes identification of issues and problems, determination of how VCE might address issues and problems through educational programs, design of the educational program, and evaluation and reporting of outcomes/impacts of the effort,” (VCE Programming Process Introduction).

Figure 5



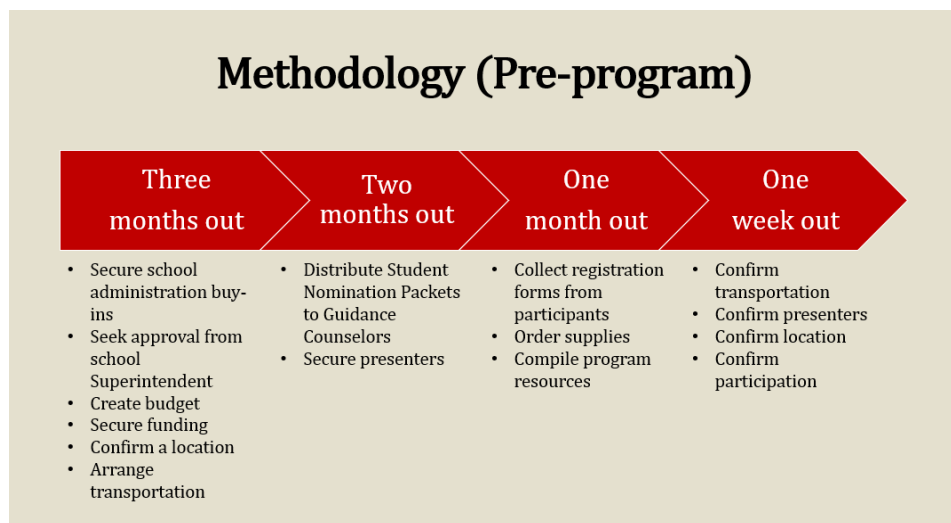
School administrators were contacted in November 2018. Through face-to-face meetings, the agent discussed basic program plans and objectives with each county high school in an effort to encourage buy-in. Once all four county high schools were on board, the school superintendent approved the event.

The event was structured to accommodate 80 students. This equated to 20 students from each of the four county high schools to be best broken down by grade (i.e., five ninth graders, five tenth graders, five 11<sup>th</sup> graders, and five 12<sup>th</sup> graders). Because the guidance counselors were responsible for nominating student participants, the agent provided each high school with an informational letter to the principals (Appendix Resource 1), information brochures (Appendix Resource 2), and a nomination letter to students (Appendix Resource 3). Guidance Counselors were instructed to nominate youth from a variety of demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds to broaden the scope of programmatic impact. These informational packets were distributed to students in early December 2018. Once nominated, students were to complete the registration form and return to their guidance counselors approximately one month before the program date. Registration information was then submitted to the agent for final program preparation.

Throughout the nomination process, the agent worked on additional logistics. The agent contacted area career development specialists from the University of Lynchburg to present as session leaders. The Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex (ODAC) in Chatham, VA was reserved to host the event, school buses and drivers were arranged to transport youth to and from their respective schools, lunch plans were made, and facilitator gifts were purchased.

Figure 6 (below) illustrates a general timeline for the planning and preparation for the SOVA WRAP summit. Additional descriptions for the methodology of the program from the students’ perspective is below.

Figure 6



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Upon arrival at ODAC, students were welcomed with lanyard nametags, a schedule for the event (Appendix Resource 4), a pen, and a professional padfolio to use in future interviews. Participants were separated into two groups based on the randomly assigned colors of lanyards (i.e., green and purple).

During Rotation One, the green group attended a session on how to write a resume. This session was led by one of the representatives from the University of Lynchburg and was facilitated using the experiential learning model. With little to no instruction, students were provided with a sheet of paper, a writing utensil, and were told to create a draft a version of their own professional resume. After approximately 15 minutes, and with the first and foremost understanding that resumes are to be typed (not hand-written), the session facilitator began walking students through the general formatting and content expectations of a professional resume.

While the green group learned about writing resumes, the purple group was busy learning about general interview preparation. More mildly utilizing the experiential learning model, the instructor welcomed participants into the session room and began asking them for their input on the kinds of questions they thought they might be asked in an interview. The remainder of the session involved discussion about what to wear and what not to wear during a professional interview and concluded with students learning the general types of questions that could be asked in an interview setting.

Once both groups participated in their first rotation of sessions, they switched for Rotation Two. The green group transitioned from resume writing to interview preparation. The purple group transitioned from interview preparation to resume writing.

Following lunch was Rotation Three. During this rotation, the green group attended a session on a proper business handshake and etiquette. This session was facilitated by a 4-H Extension Agent. As participants entered the room, they were asked to give the session leader what they considered to be a professional handshake. Once participants completed the task, the session leader began to describe the characteristics of a quality business handshake and provided an interactive learning opportunity for the participants to practice their handshakes with their peers. Following the activity, the session leader also discussed common rules of etiquette to promote basic exposure to and understanding of how students can handle themselves in a respectable manner. Examples of these rules of etiquette included, but were not limited to basic table manners, proper ways to eat common foods, and appropriate compliments and gestures.

Meanwhile, the purple group attended a session on networking. This session was also facilitated by a 4-H Extension Agent. To help participants begin to understand the concept of networking, they played a game known as Networking Bingo. Participants were provided with a list of qualities and characteristics such as, "Same amount of siblings," "Same hobbies/interests," "Has a family member in a health-related field." Students were asked to mingle around the room, engage in basic conversation with their peers, and find individuals who met the qualifications listed on their papers. Once found, the individual signed their name to the paper and continued play until all of the characteristics has signatures. This session not only fostered the interaction of participants with their peers, but also allowed participants to better understand the process of mingling and what types of questions are appropriate or inappropriate to ask during such times.

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR TEENS

Once both groups participated in Rotation Three, they switched for Rotation Four. The green group transitioned from handshaking and etiquette to networking. The purple group transitioned from networking to handshaking and etiquette. All four of the lesson plans used for this summit are available by copying and pasting this link into your preferred browser: <https://bit.ly/2Ny5ouN>.

Following each session, students were asked to anonymously complete an “exit ticket” (Appendix Resource 5). This brief evaluation gave participants the opportunity to provide feedback to their presenters regarding the content of their session. Evaluations were collected and reviewed and results were shared with presenters accordingly.

Before students were dismissed from the event, they were also asked to anonymously complete a survey on the event as a whole (Appendix Resource 6). Questions on this survey were a compilation of revised Common Measures questions (Common Measures, 2019), questions created by the Career Development Program Team through VCE, and original questions. This survey not only solicited feedback on general event content, but also fostered the application of critical thinking skills among the participants. Results of the final survey were collected and reviewed following the conclusion of the program. The school superintendent and participating school administrators received final data analysis of the post-program surveys.

Summary of Outcomes, Discussion, and Recommendations

Project Data Results

SOVA WRAP 2019 was designed to host 80 participants. However, due to weather, the event was postponed from its original date. This greatly impacted the attendance of those originally registered. The actual attendance of SOVA WRAP 2019 was 42 high school participants, all of whom completed the post-event survey. Of those 42, 86% indicated this was their first 4-H experience, 7% indicated this was year two of 4-H experiences, and 7% indicated this was year 3+ of 4-H experiences.

The following results in parentheses reflect average ratings (out of five) on the following questions: “As a result of this 4-H experience...” (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree):

- I know the importance of setting goals. (4.4)
- I am aware of a variety of career pathways. (4.47)
- I know how to identify resources to help me pursue a career. (4.28)
- I understand the value of networking to achieve career goals. (4.33)
- I know how to complete a job application. (4.23)
- I know how to create a resume. (4.3)
- I am aware of my professional appearance. (4.42)
- I am confident in my job interviewing skills. (4.14)
- I think everyone on a team is important. (4.66)
- I think I have something to contribute to a team. (4.42)
- This 4-H experience was valuable to me. (4.71)

Participants were also asked “How did this 4-H experience help prepare you for your career goals?” The size words in Figure 7 below reflect the frequency at which the themes were mentioned.

Figure 7



The end of the survey provided opportunity for open-ended feedback from participants. Additional comments/suggestions included the following as illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8



Students were also asked to provide feedback on each session in which they participated. The same set of questions were asked following each session.

- Handshaking Session (40 out of 42 respondents)
  - I learned something new from this session (100% yes)
  - The facilitator engaged me (100% yes)
  - This session is going to help me in my future (100% yes)
  - The facilitator made the information easy to understand (100% yes)
- Networking Session (42 out of 42 respondents)
  - I learned something new from this session (98% yes)
  - The facilitator engaged me (100% yes)
  - This session is going to help me in my future (100% yes)
  - The facilitator made the information easy to understand (100% yes)
- Interview Preparedness Session (42 out of 42 respondents)
  - I learned something new from this session (100% yes)
  - The facilitator engaged me (100% yes)
  - This session is going to help me in my future (100% yes)
  - The facilitator made the information easy to understand (100% yes)
- Resume and Cover Letter Writing Session (39 out of 42 respondents)
  - I learned something new from this session (100% yes)
  - The facilitator engaged me (100% yes)
  - This session is going to help me in my future (100% yes)
  - The facilitator made the information easy to understand (100% yes)

The following comments were retrieved from the “Other comments” section of each session evaluation. Notable session evaluation comments include those illustrated in Figures 9 and 10.

Figure 9

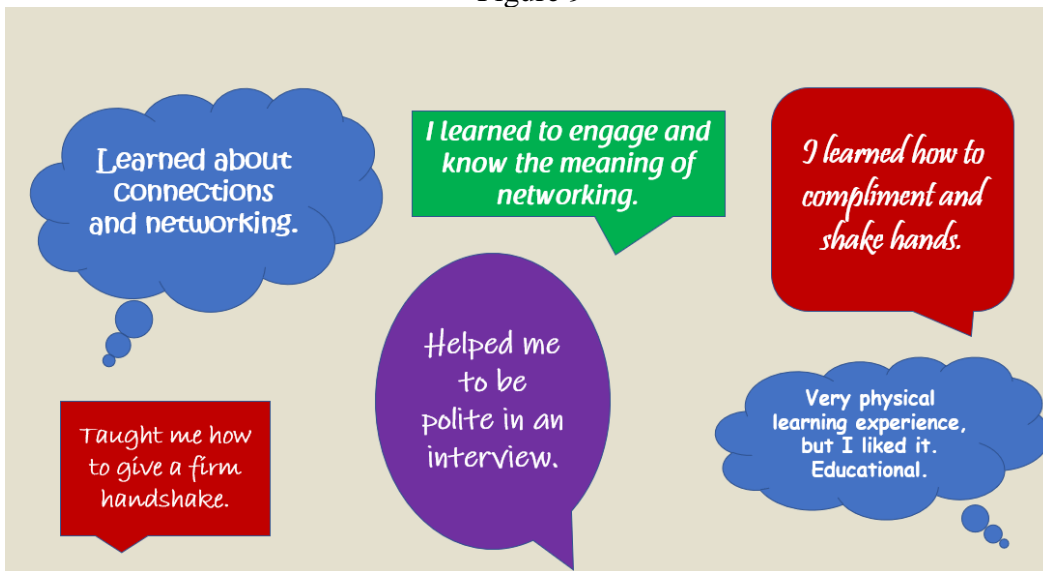
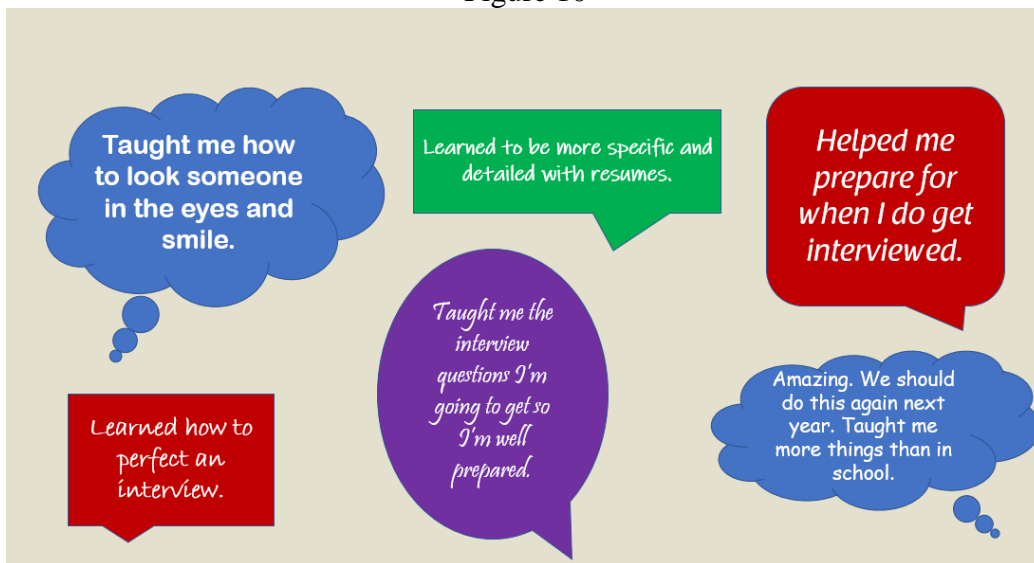


Figure 10



### Implications and Recommendations

The 2019 SOVA WRAP summit was held as a pilot program in hopes of kick-starting a long-term career development program for Pittsylvania County high school students. Given this nature, accompanied by a quick turn-around for program delivery, implications were kept basic. Participant totals were kept low, event space needed was condensed, and lunch plans were informal. As such, a few revisions to the program are recommended.

Changes for a future SOVA WRAP summit include hosting during a different month. The 2019 summit was held in January. However, the original date was postponed due to snow. Original attendance was slated to encompass a total closer to the anticipated max of 80 participants. It is believed that the change in date prevented nearly half of those registered from attending as planned.

Another recommendation is to contact involved parties more than two months in advance to plan and organize the event. This will ensure additional time to prepare and make sure details are in order. Furthermore, while Guidance Counselors were asked to nominate a broad range of students in terms of demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds, there were no definitive qualifiers for this process. The agent intends to create a nomination rubric to include in future dissemination.

Similarly, it is suggested to include more stakeholders in the planning process. As previously mentioned, SOVA WRAP 2019 was a pilot program presented in such a way as to draw attention from community members and promote additional support in future years. Now that a template exists for future planning and promotion, it should be easier to solicit buy-in from stakeholders. See Appendix Resource 8 for additional information regarding stakeholders involved in this program.

Likewise, it is recommended to broaden the scope of the program in several ways, one of which includes eventually opening up this conference to high school students from outside of the county. It is a long term goal to connect the students who attend the regionally facilitated Career ChoICE event with SOVA WRAP to further their preparedness for the workforce. Another way to broaden the impact of the summit is to invite area employers, colleges, and universities to host an actual networking event.

### Dissemination Plan

SOVA WRAP was an original idea stemming from a 4-H Extension Agent employed by Virginia Cooperative Extension. The nature of the agent's employment has already fostered general programmatic dissemination throughout colleagues. However, there are more opportunities to disseminate this summit and its benefits in the coming months.

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) has several professional development opportunities available throughout the next few months. Those include Virginia Association of Extension 4-H Agents (VAE4-HA) Annual Conference, Virginia 4-H Symposium, National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA) Annual Conference, and VCE's Annual Winter Conference. The agent anticipates submitting proposals to present on how other VCE units from across the state can partner with their school systems and community stakeholders to host their own career development events. Additionally, the agent anticipates applying for awards both through VCE and otherwise that promote the direction of the SOVA WRAP summit.

SOVA WRAP 2019 was a successfully piloted career development session. Participating high school students left the event smiling, excited, and more prepared for their successful futures. As students arrived back at school, principals overheard them laughing and sharing their fun stories from the day. This gives the agent great hope for the continuation of SOVA WRAP in years to come.

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Appendices

Resource 1: Logic Model

Resource 2: Informational Letter to Principals

Resource 3: A: Informational Registration Brochure Front

B: Informational Registration Brochure Back

Resource 4: Student Nomination Form

Resource 5: Schedule

Resource 6: Exit Ticket (session evaluations)

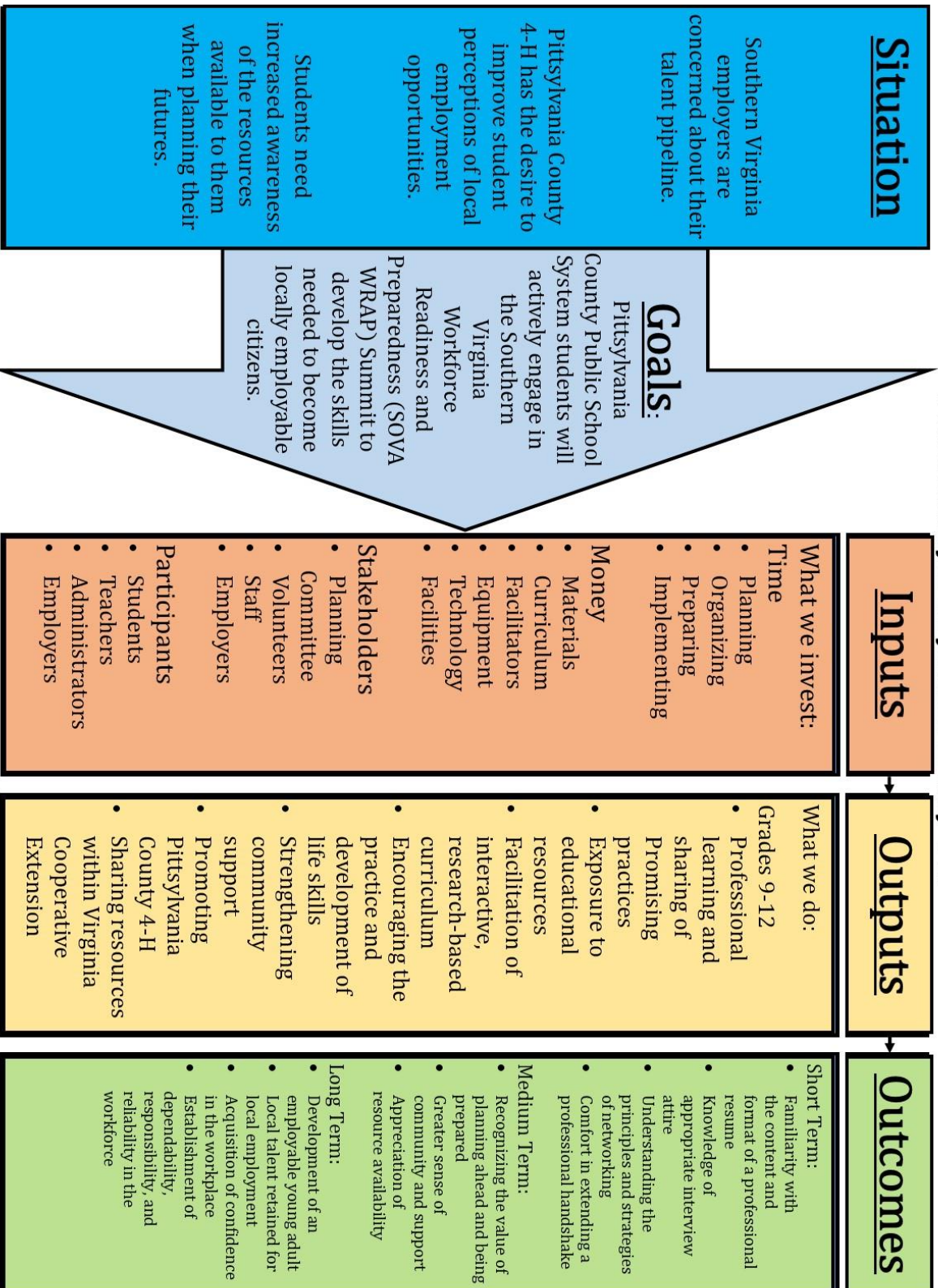
Resource 7: Final Survey

Resource 8: Stakeholders

Resource 1: Logic Model

Southern Virginia Workforce Readiness and Preparedness Summit (SOVA WRAP)

Presented by: Pittsylvania County 4-H



Resource 2: Informational Letter to Principals



Virginia Cooperative Extension  
Pittsylvania County Office  
19783 U.S. Hwy 29 South, Suite C  
Chatham, Virginia 24531  
434-432-7770 or 656-6211, Ext. 7770  
Fax: 434-432-7777  
email: Mandi@vt.edu  
<http://offices.ext.vt.edu/pittsylvania>

December 10, 2018

Dear Principals,

Pittsylvania County 4-H is planning a career development summit to help students obtain the resources they need to be successful in their future careers. Through this summit, students in grades 9-12 will engage with area specialists in the fields of marketability, resume writing, interview skills, and soft skills including a proper hand shake, eye contact, networking, and general professionalism.

This year is our first annual summit and we are so excited to have student representatives from your school! The event will be held at the Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex in Chatham, VA on **January 15, 2019** from 9:15am-2pm. (January 28<sup>th</sup> is the backup date). Transportation via school bus will be provided and paid for using 4-H program funds. Approximately 80 students from local high schools will be nominated to attend this one-day summit.

While the topic of career development is unique to several clubs, organizations, and courses that your school supports, Pittsylvania County 4-H's aim through this summit is to have a diverse group of student representatives. With that in mind, each county high school is requested to select five students from each grade (9-12) to participate in this summit. It is encouraged that students from a variety of backgrounds and with diverse career aspirations be selected to participate. Additionally, we request that 1-2 chaperones attend this event with your students for supervision purposes. Recommendations for chaperones include teachers and/or guidance counselors.

Here's what we need from you:

- Selection and confirmation of 20 students (five from each grade level at each school)
  - Please use the student nomination packet to confirm student participation
  - Nomination packets should be signed and returned to guidance by Friday, January 4, 2019.
  - We will then collect completed forms from guidance.

Thank you for your collaboration to help "make the best better" with Pittsylvania County 4-H.

Warm regards,

Mandi Dolan  
Extension Agent  
4-H Youth Development

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Resource 3A: Informational Registration Brochure Front

**Workforce Readiness and Preparedness Summit 2019**  
**Registration Form**  
 Please complete and return to your guidance counselor by **Friday, January 4th**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Race: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name (PRINT): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_


Participant Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact (Name, relation, and contact): \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Dietary Needs: \_\_\_\_\_


Additional Health Concerns/Special Accommodations: \_\_\_\_\_



If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services, or other accommodations to participate in this activity/event, please contact VCE—Pittsylvania County by calling 434/432-7770 or 656-6211, Ext. 7770, [TDD] (800)828-1120] during business hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.

*Mandi Dolan*

**Mandi Dolan**  
 Extension Agent  
 4-H Youth Development  
 Pittsylvania County Office  
 19783 US HWY 29 S Suite C  
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 434/432-7770 or 656-6211, Ext. 7770  
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Pittsylvania County 4-H  
 (in partnership with Pittsylvania  
 County Schools)  
 Presents:

**Workforce Readiness  
 and Preparedness  
 Summit 2019**



**#thatsa WRAP**

**Tuesday, January 15, 2019**  
 (Monday, January 28 is back-up date)  
 Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex




Resource 3B: Informational Registration Brochure Back

**So you have career goals, but need help achieving them...**

**THIS IS FOR YOU!**


Participants in grades 9-12 will engage with area specialists in the following fields:

- Marketability to employers
- Networking
- Resume writing
- Cover letter writing
- Interview preparation
- General professionalism
- And more!



**Perks:**

- FREE!
- Transportation provided
- Lunch provided
- Snacks available
- Time out of school (all students responsible for making up any work missed)




**Tentative Schedule:**

|             |                          |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| 9:15-9:45   | Check-in                 |
| 9:45-10:00  | Welcome and Introduction |
| 10:00-10:30 | Rotation 1               |
| 10:30-11:00 | Break/Rotate             |
| 11:00-11:30 | Rotation 2               |
| 11:30-12:00 | Break/Prep for lunch     |
| 12:00-12:30 | Rotation 3               |
| 12:30-1:00  | Break/Rotate             |
| 1:00-1:30   | Rotation 4               |
| 1:30-2:00   | Departure                |

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PLEASE INITIAL: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No



Resource 4: Student Nomination Form



Virginia Cooperative Extension  
Pittsylvania County Office  
19783 U.S. Hwy 29 South, Suite C  
Chatham, Virginia 24531  
434-432-7770 or 656-6211, Ext. 7770  
Fax: 434-432-7777  
email: Mandi@vt.edu  
<http://offices.ext.vt.edu/pittsylvania>

December 10, 2018

Dear Student,

Pittsylvania County 4-H is planning a career development summit to help students obtain the resources they need to be successful in their future careers. Through this summit, students in grades 9-12 will engage with area specialists in the fields of marketability, resume writing, interview skills, and soft skills including a proper hand shake, eye contact, networking, and general professionalism.

Congratulations! You have been nominated to participate in this event! It will be held at the Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex in Chatham, VA on January 15<sup>th</sup> from 9:15am-2pm. Attire is business professional, lunch will be provided, and participants must travel to and from the summit using the transportation provided by the program.

If this opportunity sounds like something you're interested in, please complete, sign, and return the enclosed registration form to your guidance counselor by Friday, January 4, 2019. Confirmed student participants will receive additional information upon receipt of the returned enclosed brochure.

Please contact Mandi Dolan by phone at (434)432-7770 or by email at [mandi@vt.edu](mailto:mandi@vt.edu) with questions.

Warm regards,

Mandi Dolan  
Extension Agent  
4-H Youth Development  
Pittsylvania County

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Mandi Dolan, Pittsylvania County Extension at (434)432-7770 during business hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event. \*TDD number is (800) 828-1120.

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Resource 5: Schedule

| <b>SOVA WRAP 2019 Schedule</b> |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 9:15-9:30                      | Check-in   |
| 9:30-9:45                      | Welcome and Introduction   |
| 9:45-10:30                     | Rotation 1:<br>Green Group – Resume and Cover Letter Writing<br>Purple Group – Interview Preparation |
| 10:30-10:35                    | Break/Rotate   |
| 10:35-11:20                    | Rotation 2:<br>Green Group – Interview Preparation<br>Purple Group – Resume and Cover Letter Writing |
| 11:20-12:10                    | Lunch  |
| 12:10-12:55                    | Rotation 3:<br>Green Group – Networking<br>Purple Group – Business Handshake and Etiquette           |
| 12:55-1:00                     | Break/Rotate   |
| 1:00-1:45                      | Rotation 4:<br>Green Group – Business Handshake and Etiquette<br>Purple Group - Networking           |
| 1:50-2:00                      | Final Survey and Departure   |



Resource 7: Final Survey

**Southern Virginia Workforce Readiness and Preparedness Summit Evaluation**

1) Including this year, how many years have you participated in 4-H? (Check one)

- This is my first year
- Two years
- Three or more years

2) Which of the following best describes how many hours you typically spend in 4-H programs/projects/activities each week? (Check one)

- Less than one hour
- One to three hours
- More than three hours

3) Which of the following best describes how you are involved in 4-H? (Check all that apply)

- Club(s)
- Camp(s)
- After-school program(s)
- In-school program(s)
- Local fairs/events
- Community Service Projects
- Working on 4-H projects at home
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate your response to the following statements using the scale below.

1 – Strongly Disagree    2 – Disagree    3 – Neutral    4 – Agree    5 Strongly Agree

As a result of this 4-H experience:

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4) I know the importance of setting goals.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5) I am aware of a variety of career pathways.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6) I know how to identify resources to help me pursue a career.         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7) I understand the value of networking to achieve career goals.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8) I know how to complete a job application.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9) I know how to create a resume.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10) I am aware of my professional appearance.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11) I am confident in my job interviewing skills.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12) I think everyone on a team is important.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13) I think I have something to contribute to a team.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14) This 4-H experience was valuable to me.                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15) How did this 4-H experience help prepare you for your career goals? |   |   |   |   |   |

16) Additional comments/suggestions:

Resource 8: Stakeholders

Anticipated stakeholders in random order:

- Pittsylvania County Public Schools
  - High School Administrators
  - Superintendent
  - Pupil Transportation
  - Students
  - Teachers
- Virginia Workforce Development
- Virginia Employment Commission
- Career Development agencies
- Averett University Career Development Office
- University of Lynchburg Career Services
- Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex
- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Local businesses

Actual stakeholders in random order:

- Pittsylvania County Public Schools
  - High School Administrators
  - Superintendent
  - Pupil Transportation
  - Students
  - Teachers
- University of Lynchburg Career Services
- Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex
- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Blair Construction

Future stakeholders to include (in addition to those already listed):

- Local employers from a variety of professions
- Local educational institutions
- Career ChoICE planning committee