4-H Evaluation Skill-a-Thon: Uplifting Youth's Perspectives

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Evaluation Skill-a-thon: a participatory evaluation approach for youth.

The Pima County 4-H Healthy Living Ambassadors (HLA) program developed the "Evaluation Skill-a-Thon" to 1) collect data for the end-of-year evaluation of the HLA program, 2) involve youth in the evaluation process, and 3) begin building youth's evaluation capacity.

Staff incorporated a participatory approach into their evaluation for several reasons: it aligns well with the 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold, 2018), plus participatory approaches are effective at helping people use and learn about evaluation (Zukoski & Luluquisen, 2002).

During the event, youth participating in the programming provided, analyzed, and made sense of data. Below is an overview of the event's agenda:

Welcome	Youth (ages 12 to 18 years of age) were given an overview of the event's plan and its purpose.
Data Collection	Youth were separated into two groups (i.e., Group A and Group B) and taken into separate rooms.
	Each group rotated through a set of seven self-paced activities or stations designed to provide data for evaluation questions. For example, one activity was a dot voting exercise where participants voted on which of the HLA programs encouraged them to take on leadership roles the most.
Data Analysis	Youth were asked to switch rooms, choose an activity, and to review quickly the other group's responses (i.e., Group A analyzed Group B responses). For example, for dot voting exercises they tallied up votes and made note of those that were rated higher.
	Given the number of stations and students, there were only a few students reviewing each station's responses.
Data Interpretation	Youth were asked to explore all the stations and consider the implications. They were given guiding questions to do some individual thinking and small group discussions.
Closing	Youth were asked to share out what they learned and what surprised them. HLA staff shared next steps.

After the event, HLA staff shared event results broadly with various stakeholders and continued conversations with HLA participants to plan programmatic changes for the upcoming year. In the following year, youth were also incorporated into the Evaluation Skill-a-Thon Planning.

HLA successfully incorporated youth's perspectives in programming decisions and evaluation.

Actively involving youth participants in the evaluation process using the Skill-a-Thon model resulted in youth being able to identify and design programmatic changes, increased participation and response rates in other evaluations, and several youth participants expressed an interest in evaluation and working to design evaluations in future years.

For example, results from the 2018 Evaluation Skill-a-Thon indicated that the photography activity was among youth participants' favorite activities, but that they simultaneously did not feel it helped them develop leadership skills. In response to this, youth participants were able to work with adult leaders to redevelop the photography activity by changing it to a photojournalism project. This example demonstrates how the Evaluation Skill-a-Thon met at least two of its intended uses: making judgements about which activities to continue and identifying improvements to continuing activities.

Implement an Evaluation Skill-a-Thon yourself.

The Evaluation Skill-a-Thon provides a structure that is fun and easy to both grasp and plan, making it an ideal tool to interest youth in program evaluation and assist their transition to a coordinating role in the evaluation process.

The agenda outlined on the left can be used to recreate your own Evaluation Skill-a-Thon. You can reach out to the authors of this poster for more specifics. The group is currently working on a paper describing the event in more details.

Reach out to the authors.

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