impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Statewide survey shows what keeps 4-H volunteers serving in Idaho

AT A GLANCE

A statewide survey of 335 University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program volunteers shows a committed volunteer base and identifies clear priorities for support.

The Situation

Volunteers are the backbone of 4-H. In the 2025-2026 fiscal year, 2,207 adult volunteers supported nearly 12,000 4-H youth across every county. Using a conservative estimate of 100 hours each, that is about 220,700 hours of service, valued at more than $7.1 million. Youth supported by caring adults are more likely to earn higher grades, practice leadership and give back to their communities. Yet gaps in training, support, recognition and communication drive volunteer attrition.

Losing experienced volunteers costs counties knowledge, time and youth programs. Yet Idaho had never measured volunteer experience statewide, so staff could not see what keeps volunteers serving or where support falls short.

Our Response

In the 2025-2026 program year, University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development developed and conducted the 4-H volunteer experience and retention survey. University of Idaho Extension offices distributed an online survey statewide. It measured six areas of volunteer experience on a one to five scale and asked about training needs and preferred training formats.



Volunteers are the backbone of 4-H. Volunteers provide consistency and care to help our youth thrive.

Of 400 responses, 335 were complete (84%). The 318 volunteers who named their county represent 41 of Idaho's 44 counties. Half serve as organizational leaders and 38% as project volunteers and 34% have volunteered for 10 years or longer. County-level reports were prepared for the 25 counties with five or more responses, and the statewide findings were submitted for publication as a University of Idaho Extension bulletin.

Program Outcomes

The survey gave 4-H its first statewide measure of volunteer experience. Results show a committed

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volunteer base. Four of six areas scored as strong (four or higher). Intent to keep volunteering next year averaged 4.46, and the top-rated item, "I know what to do if I suspect abuse or misconduct," averaged 4.66.

The data also pinpoints where support can improve. The lowest-rated items were "Policies are applied consistently in my county" (3.70) and "I feel valued for the contributions I make" (3.73). Top training needs were technology tools such as ZSuite (42%), club organization and leadership (37%) and mentoring teen leaders (33%). Nearly three in four volunteers (72%) are open to more training and 82% would attend by Zoom.

Table 1. Area of assessment for volunteer experiences.

Area of volunteer experience	Mean (1-5)
Role clarity and safety	4.37
Retention intent	4.34
Value and satisfaction	4.12
Confidence and training	4.04
Support and consistency	3.95
Communication	3.86

The Future

These findings give county and state staff clear priorities: technology training, club leadership support, statewide communication, consistent policy use and volunteer recognition. Plans include repeating the survey to measure change over time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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