Texas 4-H Agents’ Perceptions of Selected 4-H PRKC Competencies

According to Stone and Bieber (1997), competencies are “the application of knowledge, technical skills and personal characteristics leading to outstanding performance” (¶2). The official competency model of the 4-H Youth Development program is called the 4-H Professional Research, Knowledge, and Competency Model (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). Past research has shown that more of the competencies clustering in the Organizational Systems domain of the 4-H Professional Research, Knowledge and Competency (4-H PRKC) Model were perceived to be important by Extension 4-H agents, when compared to the competencies in any of the other five domains (Harder & Dooley, 2006). This finding indicates that a need for professional development in this domain may exist.

The proposed focus of this study is to determine the professional development needs of 4-H Extension agents in Texas using the Organizational Systems (OS) domain of the 4-H PRKC. A census will be conducted of the target population of Texas 4-H Extension agents. There are 93 Extension agents with a 4-H and Youth Development title, working within 12 districts across the state. Determining their needs may enable Texas Cooperative Extension to provide more relevant training opportunities for 4-H agents.

The self-perceived importance and proficiency in competencies under the OS domain will be measured using the Borich (1980) model of needs assessment to identify priority professional development needs. Extension agents will indicate the importance of and their proficiencies in selected competencies by completing an online questionnaire. A six-point scale (1 = not important/proficient, 6 = very important/proficient) will be used to measure participants’ perceptions of each item. Items on the questionnaire are taken directly from the 4-H PRKC, which was developed by the National 4-H Professional Development Task Force (2004). The thirteen task force members included county agents, state 4-H specialists, state 4-H program directors, and members of the National Collaboration for Youth, the National 4-H Council, and National 4-H Headquarters. The 4-H PRKC was reviewed by a seven-member professional development subject matter expert panel. This development and review process supports the content validity of the competency statements in the 4-H PRKC, and thus supports the content validity of the competency statements used for this study.

Data will be analyzed by calculating discrepancy and weighted discrepancy scores for each competency. A mean weighted discrepancy score can then be calculated to determine the ranking of professional development needs (Edwards & Briers, 1999) within the Organizational Systems domain.


