



Building Tomorrow's Workforce: A Focus on Southern Youth

Feb. 21-23, 2001
Gulfport, Mississippi

Designed to help communities make the leap forward in preparing themselves and their youth for economic and workforce development, the conference brought together a diverse team of Extension professionals, all of whom have an important role in the development of youth in the South.

As a team, participants had equal exposure to ideas and resources to start new strategies to identify and develop assets in their communities. To encourage participants to share the strategies and lessons learned from the conference with others, mini-grants were awarded to several state programs on a competitive basis.

The following are final reports regarding projects funded through the mini-grants.

*Sponsored by the Southern Rural Development Center,
UPS Foundation and National 4-H Council*



Career Explorium

Background

Many youth in rural communities and those from disadvantaged families tend to either drop out of school or enter low-paying jobs insufficient to support a family. According to the Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER), Alabama's unemployment figures are expected to inch upward to about 5 percent in 2001, with most of the lost jobs coming from the goods-producing businesses (i.e., mining, construction and manufacturing). Most of the lost jobs were low-skill jobs or jobs that required little formal or technical education and had little transferability to other fields. Although the service industry is the fastest growing sector in Alabama, it is only expected to make up about 5,500 of the new jobs for the coming year. While education is more essential than ever for good jobs, Alabama is losing more of its college graduates than it is retaining (a loss of 2.6 percent in 1998). The State of the South report (<http://www.mdcinc.org>) cautions that Alabama must create more new economy enterprises to accelerate job growth and must bring lagging rural areas with high percentages of unskilled workers into the skilled labor pool.

Project Description

Career Explorium was a two-day workshop for high school students. The focus of the first day was the process for becoming an entrepreneur. An interactive workshop was conducted for each group of students. The workshop included business games, hands-on activities and a prescription for starting a business. On the second day, students from both rural and urban counties visited the Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT) program. Alabama Works, one of Alabama's premier school-to-career programs that provides scholarships for high school students pursuing careers in industry, was highlighted during the morning session, which concluded with a tour of AIDT. The students had lunch at Martha's Place, a restaurant owned by an entrepreneur who went from being a welfare mom to a successful entrepreneur, where they received a pep-talk from Martha about the importance of setting goals, making a plan and working to make goals become a reality.

Project Objectives

Youth will:

- Be exposed to good career opportunities in the county in which they live.
- Gain an understanding of how to start a business of their own.

- Have an opportunity to explore viable entrepreneurship possibilities.
- Learn about available programs to help prepare them for future careers.

Accomplishments

About 20 students representing nine high schools participated in Career Explorium, a two-day program aimed at helping high school students increase their awareness of career possibilities, particularly at the local level. The centerpiece of this two-day experience was an entrepreneurial workshop, following by meeting and having lunch with the owner, an entrepreneur, of one of the local restaurants. Students were provided with local, real-world examples of others with similar backgrounds as their own and who were successful in starting a business. Students were challenged to dream about a business they could go into and to develop a business plan. The two-day meeting ended with a look at how they might be able to secure funding for a two-year program after completing high school. Students left eagerly anticipating similar follow-up activities in the spring and a commitment from both teachers and Extension personnel to provide more opportunities to explore career opportunities within Alabama.

Implications for Future Work

Young people want to take charge of their lives and to be successful! Offering programs that show step-by-step how anyone, regardless of their background, can be a success ensures the undivided attention of young people. Providing an opportunity for young people to meet an entrepreneur who had gone from being a welfare mom to a successful businesswoman effectively connected theory and rhetoric with daily practice.

A spring Career Explorium is being planned. The spring meeting will include a tour of the Small Business Incubator in Montgomery and the RSA Alabama Center for Commerce. The local Chamber of Commerce will be contacted to present programs at the participating schools. The Career Explorium committee is recommending to the schools the incorporation of the Small Business Administration Loan Program into the curriculum.

Lessons Learned

- Greater teacher input, including more prior preparation of the students, is needed for programs that reach into the community for optimal success to be realized.
- Students strongly identify with "real" people. Being able to talk to someone who had started with nothing and built a

successful business was a positive experience for the young people. Securing the assistance of similarly successful individuals who could serve as role models in the community for students to visit and perhaps shadow should be pursued.

■ Follow-up; follow-up; follow-up. While students are excited and their interest is at its peak is the time to provide a variety of additional workforce preparation experiences. In this case, the aim was to provide an overview of jobs available locally.

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Workforce Preparedness with 4-H

Background

Historically, 4-H programs have emphasized career development particularly in resume preparation and interview processes. 4-H projects, whether performing arts or pork production, provide young people with information on jobs and careers. Increasingly, employers and educators are calling for young people to acquire critical skills and competencies that cut across all work-place boundaries. This emphasis on workforce preparedness is reflected in a number of 4-H programs. Currently workforce preparedness efforts in Georgia 4-H programming fall into several categories including:

- Skill Development in Workforce Preparation includes providing opportunities, training and recognition for the development of communications skills. Special emphasis is given to resume building, interview techniques and individual project development. These skills are an integral part of the 4-H program. Youth can participate in district project achievement, teen leadership and several other programs using resume and interview skills in 46 subject/project areas.
- Guided Explorations through 4-H can provide a conduit for communication and scheduling visits to work sites. Exploration often occurs in the form of 4-H students using their main project (46 choices) as a focus for their work. 4-H project work and additional exploration are guided and coordinated by University of Georgia 4-H faculty. More opportunities for youth to visit work sites and shadow an adult while developing specific skills are being explored.
- Our Certified Teen Leader/All a'Bout Camp and Camp Counselor programs are model workforce programs in that 4-H'ers complete applications, participate in interviews, provide references and gain training for use in a youth-oriented work setting. While counselors are monetarily compensated for their work, ABC's complete their sessions on a volunteer basis.

During the past year, five issues were identified as focuses of the Georgia 4-H Program statewide. workforce preparedness (specifically, "increase the marketability and preparedness of youth to be productive citizens in their chosen fields") was identified. Preliminary plans include grassroots efforts for middle school and high school youth in providing county faculty with lesson plans and curriculum in this area.

Project Objectives

This mini-grant would be used to buy curriculum for county Extension agents to check out from the state curriculum specialist and for the state 4-H staff to use in programming and training. With University of Georgia faculty (County Extension Agents) stationed in every county of our state, 4-H has an excellent delivery system and means for reaching students. Serving in their roles as UGA faculty, county and state staff members has been effective in serving as counselors and advisors to students in selecting career and post-educational opportunities. The curriculum would be purchased as soon as possible. It would be showcased at Program Preview (annual update meeting in May for all 4-H agents), at the exhibit fair at the GAE4-HA state meeting in May, and at Winter School (annual training for all Extension professionals in January).

Accomplishments

The grant was used to purchase 26 workforce preparation curriculums and three workforce preparation games.

Two classes were taught at Georgia Extension Winter School, Jan. 22-24, 2002, by Cheryl Varnadoe, Extension 4-H specialist, which reached 70 county 4-H faculty members. Lori Purcell assisted in reviewing the curriculums and choosing activities from the curriculums to include in the classes. Evaluations from both classes were excellent!

The Class description was as follows: Workforce Preparation Curriculums for County 4-H Programming — workforce prepa-

ration is one of five critical issues that Georgia 4-H is focusing on this year. Numerous workforce preparation curriculums for county 4-H programming will be shared in this class. Class participants will complete several of the actual curriculum activities to gain hands-on experiences. Class participants also are invited to share any workforce preparation curriculums they have used successfully and any workforce preparation county activities they have conducted. Participants will have time at the end of the class period to look at all the curriculums.

Each participant was given a packet including a computer disc containing several lesson plans and curriculums, a descriptive glossary of all the curriculums (attached), lesson plans for county use and sample activities from many of the curriculums. The National Workforce Preparation model was also included in the packets. Class participants also competed in a Job Jeopardy Game, which was created from one of the curriculums purchased.

Implications for Future Work

The curriculums are in the process of being placed in the Georgia 4-H Curriculum Library for check-out by counties. The curriculum will be showcased at the annual 4-H Program Preview in April for more than 150 Georgia 4-H county faculty and at

the exhibit fair of the Georgia Association of Extension 4-H Agents Annual Meeting in May.

We feel that having this curriculum for county use will greatly benefit every 4-H agent in the state. We hope that we can continue to purchase additional curriculums to add to the resources available.

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Steps to Career Planning Success

Background

Many individuals and organizations in Louisiana are assisting youth with the challenges and decisions they face in shaping their transition into responsible adulthood. A highly technological society presents ever-increasing challenges and opportunities for youth as they enter the workforce at an early age. But opportunities can become problems for those who are not well prepared or who do not have access to, or information on, the resources, programs and career options that are available.

Many 4-H agents and volunteer leaders, as well as other organizations, are working to provide career development information for youth and their parents or guardians. But, research, advisory groups and youth consistently report that a lack of awareness of assistance and resources available does exist.

Also, many youth-serving agencies that offer workforce preparation programs are unaware of efforts of groups operating with similar goals. That is why The Steps to Career Planning Success Project is directed toward connecting organizations, educators and parents/guardians to support youth in achieving career development success.

Project Objectives

The purpose of the project was twofold: (1) to broaden access to career development information for both the college-bound and for youths who could benefit from other forms of post-secondary options, and (2) to establish effective coordination of career development resources in support of professional development for 4-H agents, volunteer leaders and others interested in youth workforce preparation.

Accomplishments

To facilitate a closer collaboration among the various organizations that promote youth workforce preparation, interagency cooperation was established to develop a Workforce Preparation ToolKit. The ToolKit, "The Steps to Career Planning Success," was distributed to all parish 4-H offices and regional LSU AgCenter offices in Louisiana. A four-step, career-planning component from the ToolKit is available electronically to connect other workforce preparation counselors, librarians, teachers and parents/guardians to the latest research and web-based tools in youth career development.

Through the project, the following educational tools were made available: (1) Workforce Preparation ToolKit (81 portable files of career development books, lesson plans, research reports, evaluation tools, program planning tools), (2) an interactive, self-instructional, Internet-based career-planning training program, (on diskette) and (3) the establishment of a Workforce Preparation Resource Repository at the State 4-H Office (workforce preparation audio/visuals for loan across the state).

To extend the range and effectiveness of the project, training sessions were held to promote use of the resources developed. To develop the kit and conduct trainings, the LSU AgCenter established new connections with community college counselors, Louisiana's and various other state departments of labor, College Career Services offices, the Louisiana Resource Center for Educators, School-to-Work and TECH Prep Program coordinators and several state occupational information coordinating committees that operate under state Workforce Development and Economic Security departments.

Implications for Future Work

The Steps to Career Planning Success is a groundbreaking collaborative effort that brings together LSU AgCenter youth development staff members, other educators and youth to trans-

form the way workforce preparation educators are trained and how youth access career development information. Technology-based training can help to streamline training budgets by making learning opportunities more widely available to agency employees, youth and family members.

The LSU AgCenter is able to increase program delivery by using the Internet to provide workforce preparation materials that can be accessed over communications networks and run on a broad range of hardware platforms. The ultimate goal is to establish a "Virtual Resource Center" that features a youth-focused workforce preparation web site that provides links to interactive career planning tools. The goal is to provide information on career assessment, occupational research, education options, job search strategies and information on how to be successful on the job.

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Workforce Preparedness Partnership

Background

The current situation with regard to youth workforce issues is Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU-ES) and the Workforce Investment Board (South Delta Planning & Development) are as follows:

- There is a lack of communication between agencies providing workforce preparedness programming.
- Many MSU-ES agents are not familiar with Workforce Investment Boards (South Delta Planning & Development) and the programs they offer.
- Workforce Investment Boards are not familiar with MSU-ES programming efforts.
- MSU-ES is not familiar with the Workforce Investment Act.

Description of Project

The South Delta Planning and Development District (SDPDD)

and Mississippi University Extension Service (MSU-ES) conducted a mini-conference centered around workforce preparedness. The conference was held at the Delta Research and Extension Center in Stoneville. The conference was held Friday, Dec. 7, 2001, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Representatives from both agencies were given an opportunity to share programs and other curricula that was being offered to youth in counties being served by the agencies. The Director from South Delta provided an overview of the programs offered by the agency. The same type of information was shared from the Extension side by the 4-H Youth Development Specialist and field level agents. Various programs were highlighted and several curriculum pieces were shared with the group.

Lunch was provided and participants from both agencies were grouped according to their home counties. Over lunch, groups spent time discussing plans they could implement jointly in their counties. Through this process, partnerships were formed and several ideas were brought into each area plan.

Project Objectives

To form a partnership between South Delta Planning and Development District and Extension Service/4-H.

To make agencies aware of the work being performed in counties where Extension and South Delta employees work.

To create an awareness of programs offered by both agencies.

Accomplishments

The ultimate goal was to form a partnership between South Delta and the Extension Service/4-H that would foster innovative programming for youth centered around workforce and entrepreneurship.

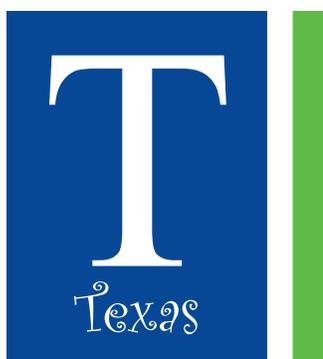
Memorandums of Understanding were developed between the two agencies. The memorandums were introduced to assure the support needed from both agencies.

Implications for Future Work

Plans for already in progress to work on a future project. Both Extension and South Delta will take part in a training offered by the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership. Plans are to be involved in this program starting in April. The program is entitled "Mini Society." Once employees from both agencies have completed a training to teach Mini-Society, plans are to have members from both groups team-up and deliver the program in various counties in Mississippi.

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Entrepreneurial Education

Background

Texas and Oklahoma partnered to address youth workforce efforts directed by each state's workforce commission. Until recently there was little direct involvement of Extension resources in youth workforce efforts. Both states' Extension systems recognized the potential of partnering with workforce boards and centers to provide youth workforce and entrepreneurial education to key players in the youth efforts. Workforce boards are interested in generating new grantees and new methods to target youth 14-24.

Youth Entrepreneurship is increasing its presence within Extension programming and within agencies, schools and organizations throughout the state. 4-H and youth development projects in Aerospace, "Me, Inc.," and "Community Partnerships" have provided younger youth with career awareness and job skills experienced. Through the 1999 Texas Community Futures Forums, 57 counties identified youth job skills and/or entrepreneurship skills as a key community issue.

A concentrated and coordinated effort was needed in Texas and Oklahoma. Texas' State Strengthening Grant through CYFAR targets at-risk youth in a project called T-TEEMS, Texas Teens Explore Entrepreneurial Minds, using entrepreneurial education to stimulate income and employment alternatives for youth and their families in both urban and rural locations.

Collectively the states planned a two-day conference at the Texas 4-H Center in Brownwood, Texas. The conference targeted key counties in Texas that cited youth workforce issues, Workforce Center staff, youth workforce board youth members, community and technical colleges, and Community Learning Centers, along with community technology centers, Chambers of Commerce and bankers. A planning team comprised of Texas Cooperative Extension faculty, Prairie View A&M Cooperative Extension Program specialists, Texas Workforce Commission, Oklahoma Extension Service faculty, University of Texas/-Brownsville faculty and T-TEEM staff planned the conference. Additional funding was obtained for non-Extension personnel travel through a Kellogg Collective Leadership Grant from Texas A&M and the T-TEEM project.

Project Objectives

The conference was planned to involve about 30 individuals in order to:

- Develop new partnerships to address youth workforce issues at the local level.
- Explore resources in youth entrepreneurship and workforce training.
- Increase understanding of adolescent (14-19) youth development.

- Learn about models of youth workforce and youth entrepreneurship (T-TEEMS-Texas Teens Explore Entrepreneurial Minds) in Texas.

The program content focused on mentoring adolescents, youth population demographics, youth entrepreneurial projects, team building and a mini-ropes course, funding and models that work. Three models of youth workforce projects were presented by Extension and university faculty.

Multiple resource experts in team building, demographics, and adolescent mentoring were contacted and presented at the conference via direct presentation, video tape, and distance education methods, i.e, using distance technology through Colorado State University to connect an agency in Denver.

Accomplishments

Twenty-six individuals participated representing three workforce boards, a workforce contractor, two community learning center project leaders, county extension agents and specialists involved in youth development, including three county Extension agents in Agriculture. Both urban and rural counties and communities were represented ranging from Houston/Gaveston to the lower Rio Grande counties, to rural west and East Texas. Though no youth were able to participate in the conference, those working with youth reported definite plans to implement programming to benefit youth. Following are several specific examples of outcomes:

- Customize youth programming for specific audiences
- Connect with schools, including charter schools, and Community Development Corporations
- Strengthen community involvement through partnerships with business and agency partnerships, including Workforce Development Boards and Centers.
- Develop leadership and mentoring programs for youth
- Plan for project sustainability and incorporation of youth workforce ideas into existing programs
- Secure resources for youth workforce programming

Evaluations indicated that participants were committed to building collaborations through workforce teams.

In summary, the efforts taken to plan and implement this mini-conference on behalf of building youth workforce efforts resulted in a broader awareness of partnering opportunities. Though Oklahoma was not able to participate in the actual conference, awareness was increased and indicated through inquiry from Workforce boards. The targeted counties in Texas responded positively to this opportunity and continue to build upon the experience as evidenced in program plans for 2002. Through the out-of-state expert involvement in collaboration, Texas youth development programs have the opportunity for stronger youth workforce board awareness and involvement.

Implications for Future Work

The concept of a mini-conference involving diverse audiences, as was the case in the Texas project, is conducive to team building and developing collaborative projects. Involving youth is challenging because of conflicting work/school scheduling and distance for travel that requires that youth miss school. However, future work should address how to overcome this obstacle if workforce programming is to address “workable practices.”

Participants reported that they were unaware of the multiple opportunities on-going in the state. Multi-state projects would benefit from local workforce and Extension participation in planning to obtain participation from multiple states. More mini-conferences could result in stronger regional and statewide partnerships.

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The Reality Store

Background

Currently Virginia 4-H offers a variety of learning experiences in support of workforce preparation. These include entrepre-

neurship, high school financial planning, and mentoring. In addition the system advertises such products as Careers and Me, Dream Catcher, Pathfinder, Wild Over Work, and Mini Society. However, even with the introduction of the before-

mentioned programs and curricula, Virginia does not have a comprehensive curricula plan for workforce preparedness. The program is fragmented at best with each of the state's 107 units offering "what feels good" to the individual agent.

A train-the-trainer model will be implemented to pilot test the Reality Store curriculum in six Extension units across the state. Each agent will develop a community collaborative team to help plan, develop, implement and evaluate Reality Store efforts. As the first curriculum piece is introduced the curriculum component committee will stabilize itself in order to offer additional programs. These programs will include soft-skills curriculum that will be used as a follow-up with participants of the Reality Store. In the second year of implementing the Reality Store curriculum, the Careers and Economic Education Curriculum Component Committee will introduce a soft-skill curriculum for piloting and testing within the Virginia 4-H program.

Project Objectives

To develop, implement and evaluate a workforce preparedness initiative for Virginia Cooperative Extension 4-H program.

To develop a more comprehensive and collaborative Careers and Economic Education Curriculum Component Committee. This committee will comprise of businesses, chamber of commerce, youth, extension agents, WIA representatives and other appropriate community members by December 2002.

Accomplishments

Virginia agreed to conduct a train-the-trainer session on The Reality Store curriculum for six community teams, one in each of the six districts. The intent was for the each team to replicate the training session in their district. As promised the state training was organized, planned and held on Nov. 10, 2001, in Richmond, Va.

In partnership with the Careers and Economics Education Curriculum Committee, a statewide invitation was extended to agents seeking community teams willing to receive training and thusly conduct train-the-trainer sessions in their respective districts. As a result of these efforts, 11 teams were trained, representing 17 of our Extension units.

Implications for Future Work

Plans are underway to have the Reality Store as an experience at the 2002 Virginia State 4-H Congress. In addition, the Careers and Economics Education Curriculum Committee will follow-up on the District train-the-trainer sessions and Reality Store programming in local communities.

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