

New Youth Entrepreneurship Curriculum on the Horizon

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Agricultural Economics is teaming up with Cooperative Extension's 4-H Development Program to produce a youth entrepreneurship curricula that incorporates 4-H projects, entrepreneurship, schools and community.

4-H, a name synonymous with youth, leadership, family, and positive development is the largest non-formal youth program in the United States. 4-H helps to lay the foundation to create America's future, developing skills and aptitudes for a breadth of industries and interests.

Today's 4-H has moved beyond the traditional rural settings to having a nationwide presence in urban and rural settings. Youth encounter 4-H in their classrooms, during after-school activities, at camp, in clubs or on-line. This 4-H evolution has resulted in new delivery methodologies, curricula and local partnerships that better meet the needs of aspiring youth.

A similar trend is occurring in youth entrepreneurship. Policy makers from the national to the local levels are expressing the need for quality entrepreneurship education and training, as are students.

Other team members included in the curricula project are from the Nebraska Department of Education, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Department of Textile, Clothing & Design. Initial funding is provided by the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship's Hometown Competitiveness project (funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.)

Initial Research

A study, conducted by Nathan Hamen, graduate student in the Department of Agricultural Leadership Education and Communication, provided insights into the need for youth entrepreneurship when conducted focus group sessions in three communities:

1. Groups identified a lack of community resources available to assist youth entrepreneurs.
2. Resources need to be available when youth are ready to explore.
3. Lack of knowledge on how to effectively mentor youth.
4. Lack of knowledge of local opportunities and financial resources.
5. Current and limited entrepreneurial efforts do not link back to the schools and community.
6. Identified a need for a "road map" for youth businesses on getting started.

7. Identified a need for a “road map” for communities on how they can develop and support youth entrepreneurial efforts.

These insights identify a need for a holistic approach to youth entrepreneurship. What is needed is a program that is individually based, yet linked to the community, and available on demand. The 4-H organization provides a unique framework that can meet this need and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is highly qualified to fulfill this need.

Project Goals

The goal of the 4-H Entrepreneur Ship Investigation (ESI) curricula is to deliver high-quality entrepreneurial education that is available to youth at any time and any place. The ESI curriculum will allow youth to systematically build entrepreneurial skills as they progress through the various curricula levels. The curriculum will be designed for many delivery arenas including schools, organizations and 4-H clubs.

Youth will first gain exposure to entrepreneurial concepts and idea exploration through “awareness activities” that can be taught by 4-H leaders, teachers and organizations. On the intermediate level, youth will gain greater knowledge depth and idea generation, relating their 4-H projects to entrepreneurial or career possibilities. Youth can take the intermediate entrepreneurship level to explore multiple project opportunities or move into a more advanced level curriculum for greater breadth and knowledge about a chosen area of interest and business. This horizontal or vertical focus helps emphasize individual self-determination through choice -- a very empowering skill for youth.

Project Outcomes

Once completed, the team will have developed high-quality youth entrepreneurship curricula for use by 4-H and Extension, schools and community organizations that is grounded in 4-H principals, schools standards and employs community involvement to inspire youth entrepreneurship.

Through the curricula, we expect:

- Youth will acquire greater economic awareness of their local community and region through research and interaction with community business owners and economic leaders.
- Youth will develop entrepreneurial interests and skills, including practical business applications, understanding of the business planning process and use of the business plan for decision-making.
- Youth will develop mentor relationships with local business owners and enhance relationships with business professionals.
- In the advanced level, youth will use learned skills to start a business that increases their personal economic status.

- 4-H clubs and leaders, community economic organizations, and schools will use curricula to help youth explore entrepreneurial ideas.
- Community will recognize the youth business efforts through public affirmation in local media and provide mechanisms for local investments.
- Youth will learn how the community plays a role in entrepreneurial development. Youth will also become familiar with civic entrepreneurs.

Project Status

Writing for the intermediate level ESI curriculum is scheduled to begin in June, with drafts completed by September, 2006. Pilot projects will be organized in Fall, 2006 and curriculum finalized and ready for delivery in Spring 2007.

Other ESI curricula projects to be developed include exploratory activities, electronic simulations, and an advanced level curricula with integration into most 4-H individual projects.

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