

**Stepping into the Lime Light:
Preparing 4-H Members for Leadership & Service at the State Level**

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Abstract

The [STATE] 4–H Council is a team of young people selected to represent the [STATE] 4–H Program. Preparing these young people for their term is essential. Authors will discuss *EL MAR: A Seaworthy Mission*, an innovative professional development program that prepares members for leading and serving the [STATE] 4–H program.

Introduction / Need for Innovation

Through participation in a variety of different kinds of activities, young people begin to develop the positive leadership skills that make them future leaders of this nation. Seevers and Dormody (1995) found that in an assessment of activities where 4–H members ranked the activities they believed allowed them the best opportunity to gain leadership life skills, four activities tied for the number one spot. “Holding an office” was the first of those four activities. Cantrell, Heinsohn, and Doebler (1989) found that leadership skill development increased when 4–H members experienced leadership roles beyond the club level.

The [STATE] State 4–H Council is a team of young people selected to fill the highest positions of state leadership attainable in the 4–H program. Twelve young people hold Council positions, representing the state 4–H program for one-year terms. They are the most visible of all 4–H members, responsible for industry contacts and public appearances, planning and organizing events, and facilitating the statewide service-learning program. [STATE] State 4–H Council members receive opportunities that are not available to other 4–H members, including extensive travel, networking and training.

While Seevers and Dormody (1995) found that “holding an office” is one of the capstone leadership development experiences, training is still a necessity for young people in an officer position to learn specifics of the position, hone skills that will be utilized throughout their terms, and get acquainted with their fellow team members. In preparation for their year of service, Council members receive training and professional development. When leadership development faculty members were appointed as the Council advisors, it was quickly ascertained that instead of inspiring the group to lead and serve, training had become bogged down with learning how to MC events, event planning, and how to report monthly activities. The Council members were bored and uninspired. Many thought their job consisted solely of the “lime light moments” where they got to stand in front of a group of their peers and be the ones speaking at the microphone. Any semblance of true transformational leadership had been stripped away; they were mere figureheads, where once extension administration had hoped to develop true leaders. It was from the desire to turn training from a drudge to a motivational and inspirational event that *EL MAR: A Seaworthy Mission* was born, and has now become the program that addresses the need for State Officer training and preparation in [STATE].

Practice Objectives

- State council members will be able to accurately articulate: what is 4–H, the vision, mission, and goals of the [STATE] 4–H program, and how the 4–H program has made an impact upon their lives.
- State council members will maintain an up-lifting, encouraging attitude that inspires other 4–H members to aspire to serve their communities, country, and world at a higher level.
- State council members will lead by example. They will make positive decisions at all times, remembering that they are a highly visible representative of themselves, their families, their county and state 4–H programs, and the [STATE] 4–H program as a whole.
- State council members will maintain a positive attitude at all times, and will motivate others to be the best 4–H member that they can be.
- State council members will serve as an advocate for the [STATE] 4–H program, being knowledgeable of all [STATE] 4–H projects, programs, and opportunities available to their peers. State council members will encourage 4–H members to take advantage of the opportunities available to them through the [STATE] 4–H program.
- State council members will represent the [STATE] 4–H Council and the [STATE] 4–H Program and any and all 4–H events they attend, from a project club meeting to the National 4–H Conference, and everything in between.

How It Works

EL MAR is a three-day retreat held annually two weeks after the officer induction at the state leadership conference. Gone are the bare bones walls of a university class or dorm room. In their place, the Council members spend their retreat at a hotel and conference facility, their meeting and hotel rooms decorated with fish, seashells, and life preservers to provide a fun, light atmosphere for what is a more rigorous approach to professional development. The goal of the program is to prepare the young people for their year of service by focusing, not on the day to day tasks of being a state officer, but on the larger missions of **E**ncouraging members and leaders, **L**eading by Example, **M**otivating members toward greater participation, **A**dvocating on behalf of the larger 4–H program, and **R**epresenting 4–H members, leaders, volunteers, and faculty at all times to constituents and programmatic stakeholders; **EL MAR**.

Day One – Council members are welcomed to the facility by advisors and 4–H program staff in the early afternoon. Training focuses on familiarizing the new team with the principles of EL MAR, as well as with their new roles as officers and each other. Specific sessions include: *Roles & Responsibilities of Council Members*, *Teambuilding*, and *Creating an Environment of EL MAR!*

Day Two – Training workshops begin directly after breakfast and continue throughout the day. Training workshops focus outwardly in day two, still incorporating the EL MAR principles. Sessions include: *Making Member Connections*, *Sharing the Public Value of our 4–H Programs*, and *Technology and 4–H: Blogs, Wikis and Other Communication Tools*. Following dinner, Council Members experience a public speaking session where they work with faculty and staff to create and practice workshop speeches, presentations and mock interviews. Day two ends with a social activity provided by the newly retired officer team and have included a hayride, bonfire, and [UNIVERSITY NAME] basketball game.

Day Three – Training begins, again, directly after breakfast, and is focused on providing the final tools Council members will use throughout their terms. Sessions include: *Etiquette for Every Situation*, *Parliamentary Procedure*, and *Developing Great Workshops*.

Results to Date, Implications, and Recommendations

The success of the *EL MAR* program has been evident in the growth of the State Council program, and the positive feedback received from Council members and the extension educators with whom they work. For the past four years, 4–H program faculty have solicited and implemented feedback from former Council members to improve and enhance future retreats. This feedback has led to the inclusion of more training sessions throughout the weekend, public speaking resources and evaluation tools that can be used after workshop sessions. Extension educators provide feedback to program faculty after Council members attend events. This feedback allows faculty to adjust future training and also provides mid-term training topics to address needs that arise throughout the year.

Future Plans and Advice to Others

Future plans include the incorporation of a fourth day of training. Because of programmatic feedback received throughout the last four years, faculty members are working to build the resources for a fourth day of training. By building in a fourth day, Council members would be allowed more opportunities for hands on learning, more time spent on topics that require deeper reflection (like goal setting), and more “down time”; a valuable commodity considering the current rigorous nature of the training.

Costs and Resources Needed

EL MAR is funded by the [STATE] State 4–H program via grants and private donors. Approximate cost of the weekend for room and board for all participants is \$1200. Training resources (notebooks, copies, honorariums, etc.) cost approximately \$500. The only cost to Council member participants is transportation to and from the hotel. The most important resources for the program are the workshop presenters. Learning is the core of the program, and program faculty rely heavily on the talents of extension staff, other faculty members, and graduate students who donate their time to provide the training.

References

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Biographies

Jodi L. Torock is a graduate and teaching assistant in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication at Texas A&M University. Jodi received a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University. Growing up in Pennsylvania, she was an active 4-H member, and served as Pennsylvania State 4-H Council President in 2004. Upon graduation, Jodi plans to obtain a position within the Cooperative Extension System as a 4-H and Youth Development Educator. In this role, Jodi would like to help other youth have the same great leadership and service opportunities that she experienced through the 4-H program.

Dr. Jacklyn A. Bruce is an Assistant Professor of Youth and Adult Leadership Development at The Pennsylvania State University in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education. In this position, Dr. Bruce provides leadership for a variety of state level leadership development programming for the Pennsylvania 4-H program, maintains a rigorous research program in the area of transfer of leadership training and skills and an outreach program on working with teens for Pennsylvania's 4-H Youth Development Extension Agents.