

4-H History: Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Now.

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Ribbons and Records: The History of 4-H Awards and Recognition

by Jane E. Jopling, N4-HHPT Member

Editor's Note: This is the first of a series of articles that examine the history of 4-H awards and recognition.

It was 1914 and a fifteen-year-old 4-H award winner was thrilled to be in Washington D.C. She was given the honor of meeting President Woodrow Wilson at the White House. He grasped her hand to greet her and said, "Margaret, what have you done to be entitled to represent the great state of Minnesota at the nation's capital?" Stunned by the question, she responded, "Mr. President, I have only learned to bake some good bread!" His response to her holds true today, as he firmly said "In America we have only one title to nobility and that is achievement. You 4-H'ers have won that title."

Ribbons, trophies, pins and certificates have always been used as a main part of the 4-H program to highlight the results of hard work and achievement. In the 1800's, local awards and prizes were used in many American agricultural and home economics programs. Exhibits at courthouses, schools and community places became the county agricultural fairs of today. Besides exhibiting, comparisons could be made between the submissions. Competition provided the opportunity for the youth to master and demonstrate life skills which could be used in the real world.



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As research revealed improved agricultural methods, pre-4-H “Corn Clubs” for youth were formed to teach these methods to youth to help them increase their corn production. While the youths rejoiced in winning cash prizes, their parents took notice of their research-based results.

In the early 1900’s, the idea of trips was introduced as recognition for exceptional achievement. In 1919, Amour Packing Company awarded forty boys and girls the opportunity to attend the Chicago International Live Stock Exposition. These trips became annual and evolved into the “National 4-H Congress”.

In 1922, the National Committee on Boys’ and Girls’ Club Work, later called the National 4-H Service Committee, recruited the Montgomery Ward Company to provide trips to National 4-H Congress for home economics 4-H girls continuing to recognize 4-H’ers through partnerships with national businesses. This action underscored the importance of private sponsors in local, state and national 4-H program recognition.

Washington DC was another favorite place to provide youth experiences. In 1925 the National Committee, offered eight youth scholarships to the nation’s capital to the state 4-H programs which showed “the greatest ratio of completed projects compared to the previous year.”

The 4-H Standard Report Form was introduced in 1936 offering a structured record keeping experience. This would set the path for recognition selection for years to come.

The introduction of the “4-H Handy Book’ (1936), and later the “The 4-H Awards Handbook” (1938), offered 4-Hers the opportunity to see and select areas in which they excelled.

In 1953, a major national study was conducted that standardized and simplified the awards system. Significant improvements were also made in 1973 and again in 1977. State and local 4-H programs likewise revised their recognition programs to offer 4-H’ers greater opportunities for recognition.

Whether it’s a ribbon at the local fair or a college scholarship, young people gain life skills and confidence through this facet of 4-H. The experiences gained through recognition, travel and social interaction with others provide experiences that shape young people’s lives today and for years to come.



4-H Youth Use Community Mapping to Improve Human Health

by Tom Tate, N4-HHPT Chair and National Program Leader (Retired), Extension Service, USDA

All 4-H Club members pledge their Heads, Hearts, Hands and Health to better their world. In 2003, 4-H’ers saw a new opportunity to do so when GIS (geographic information system), GPS (Global Positioning System) and Remote Sensing tools were introduced at state and regional 4-H workshops. Several 4-H’ers, and their adult 4-H volunteer leaders, were so fascinated by the new hand-held tools that they organized the National 4-H GIS and GPS Leadership Team. Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI) through its K-12 Educations partnerships, provided 4-H Clubs with hands-on access to their online GIS software, ARCGIS.

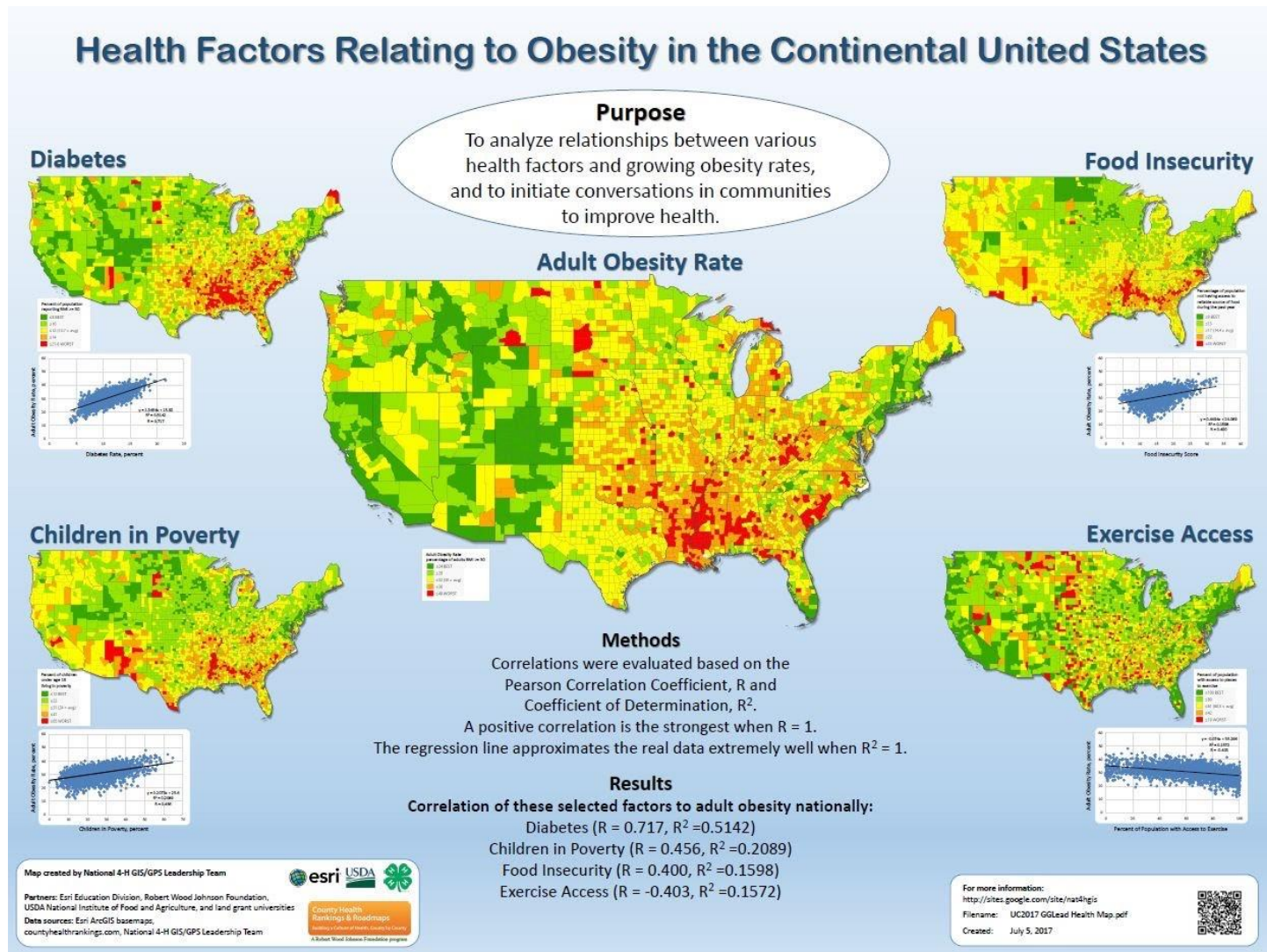
Since 2003, thousands of 4-H clubs have formed to explore a variety of ways that GIS, GPS and remote sensing could be used to map interesting problems that could be improved through a youth service project, in their hometown or county. Throughout the U.S. GIS savvy college students and GIS professionals, play a critical mentor role, as caring adults, to help 4-H Youth explore ways to build ARCGIS into their 4-H activities. The GIS savvy mentor is critical to the success of

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the youth-adult partnership. Problems 4-H'ers have identified for their Community Improvement Projects span a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges facing their communities. Mapping project examples include potholes, tree limbs most likely to fall on power lines during storms, firefighting water sources and temporary shelters for people and pets who have lost their homes in a natural disaster. By mapping land use changes in communities, environmental changes such as from primarily agricultural and forestry to housing, commercial and recreational use, the 4-H'ers have discovered changes over time unnoticed by many adults in their communities, very often resulting in community action. Many of the GIS 4-H alumni have utilized their new skills in public and private organization internships, often creating changes the hiring organizations never expected or even knew they needed.

Most recently, the youth teams have been focusing on human health, especially where the impact of national epidemics such as obesity and substance abuse are hitting hardest. "How healthy in My Community?" has become the key question being addressed by ARCGIS toting 4-H community problem solvers. The National 4-H Geospatial Leadership Team has produced maps which show how widespread the national problems of obesity and opioid abuse have become.



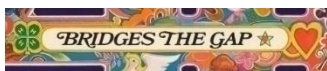
In the past three years, 4-H youth GIS teams have been conducting workshops on mapping: "How Healthy is My Community? The goal of the program is to empower a youth/adult team in every state, to provide 4-H leadership to explore local, state and national health data; analyze what the data says; and visualize it so that the most pressing human health needs can be more easily viewed and understood. By understanding the most pressing human health needs, the

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youth-adult partnership can get the community at large to take action to improve the most pressing health needs. These efforts have proved positive in the states of Tennessee, North Carolina, New York, Louisiana and Maryland. Only 45 states to go.

The National 4-H Youth Health Mapping Team invites everyone to help with these programs. Their vision is to get youth in all 50 states involved in creating and exhibiting “How Healthy is My Community?” maps at county and state fairs across the nation between now and 2027. If you are a GIS user, the team encourages you to adopt or help mentor a 4-H “How Healthy is My Community?” mapping team in your state or county. For more information:

- Email the National 4-H GIS and GPS Leadership Team at: nat4hgis@gmail.com
- The **National 4-H GPS/GIS Leadership Website**: <https://sites.google.com/site/nat4hgis/>
- Visit the 4-H Health Team Website: <http://HealthDataToAction.com>
- Youth Community Mapping: www.youthcommunitymapping.org
- Esri User Conference 2017: 4-H Tennessee GIS: https://mediaspace.esri.com/media/t/1_vvf28hr5



REVIEW OF 4-H INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE RESEARCH

By **Gwen El Sawi**, N4-HHPT Member and Grandmother!!!!

Editor's Note: The following article is the second of a series on 4-H International Programs. Although it greatly exceeds the approximate 500-word article length guideline that the BRIDGE recommends, we encourage the reader to consider it because it is an interesting and enlightening overview of how the 4-H International programs have impacted both the 4-H program and the international 4-H exchange participants since the late 1960s, proving, as the first series article stated, 4-H International Exchanges are "a whole lot more than a trip!"

In a previous article, “**4-H International Exchanges: A whole lot more than a trip!**” (v. 13, # 4 - November 2024; <https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Newsletter/PDF/NewsletterV13no4November2024.pdf>) a sampling of personal accounts of the impact that participation in 4-H International Exchange Programs had on the lives of participants were explored. The purpose of this article is to describe and reflect on the research findings on what, if any, impact participating in 4-H international exchanges has on participants, their communities, and the 4-H program, with suggestions and recommendations for program improvements. The studies are reviewed in chronological order.

The author does not pretend to have found all research related to 4-H international exchanges but rather summarizes what evidence has been found to help us better understand the value and impact of 4-H international exchanges as well as identify key areas for improvement and further research. There were several studies cited in more than one research study that were not available or accessible at the time of this review.

1. **1967 - Richard Tenney, IFYE Ohio-France 1959**, conducted two studies for his master's (1967) and PHD (1969) in Agricultural Education at Penn State University. In the first study: **“The Influence of the International Farm Youth Exchange Experience on the Educational Development and Occupational Choice of the United States Delegates”** he found a slight (but not significant) difference in the educational level of alumni compared to a control group; however, there was a significant **increase in the impact of the experience on their education** (what was studied). Occupational choice did not change, but **nearly half of the IFYE alumni planned to go into international work after participation**. Community involvement (number of groups alumni belonged to) was not significantly different; however, there was a significant difference between the **intensity** of involvement, with **alumni more intensively involved than** members of the control group.

1969 - In 2001, Tenny wrote “The purpose of my **1969** study, **“IFYE Alumni: The Conception and Performance of Roles Promoting International Understanding,”** was to determine the correlation and interaction of both

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personal and program characteristics on the importance and performance of selected roles promoting international understanding as rated and performed by IFYE alumni.”

IFYE News. FALL 2001. (https://ifyeusa.org/file_download/inline/3ee34a78-c749-483c-8f48-af3c08763a64)

He summarized the 1969 study findings.

- ✓ A person with an “IFYE-type experience” will **perform higher** in the **promotion of international understanding** roles than a person who has not had this type of experience.
- ✓ As years passed, IFYE alumni have attached **increasing importance** to the promotion of international understanding and have performed accordingly.
- ✓ IFYE alumni are becoming **more effective** in their role performance relative to their role expectations.

In conclusion, these two studies “showed that, other factors being similar, there is a **definite positive influence on a person who has had an IFYE-type experience**” We can also see that the influence (of the exchange experience) is **positive as it relates to the promotion of international understanding, influencing an international focus in education and career focus, and increased intensity in community involvement.**”

2. **1971 - Anna Marie Boyd, IFYE WA-Brazil 1966**, completed **“An Analysis of the Role of the International Farm Youth Exchange Program in Cross-Cultural Communication,”** for her master's degree requirement at Washington State University.

The study **1) described the IFYE program**; its goals, function, organizational structure, operations, and financial arrangements; **2) described the concept of cross-cultural communication and its implications for international understanding and world peace**; and **3) an evaluation of the IFYE program and its effectiveness in enhancing cross-cultural communications** throughout the world. Note: This study has an excellent literature review of the history of IFYE, cites several evaluations of the program, participants, and host families in the bibliography, as well as defining cross-cultural communication as applied to the IFYE program. It is available in the ERIC research system. (<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED066633>)

Boyd concluded that from the variables studied, the **IFYE program does facilitate cross-cultural communication** through **1) Objectives; 2) Structure; 3) IFYE Participants; 4) IFYE Responsibilities; 5) Orientation; and 6) “that IFYE promotes the end product of cross-cultural communication** (defined as where “one person affects the inner state of thought or feeling in another person by producing positive attitudes toward the exchange program, the IFYE exchangee, and more open attitudes toward other countries and people.)

Boyd also identified three possible **weaknesses** of the IFYE program:

1) inadequate language training, 2) lack of emphasis on human relations skills in the training program, and **3) a short length of time** with a host family. Boyd also suggested that **additional research was needed**.

3. **1987 - Gwen El Sawi, IFYE MN-India 1969**, conducted an **Evaluability Assessment of 4-H International Exchange Programs** in response to questions raised within 4-H/Extension system regarding the value and viability of 4-H international exchanges. (An evaluability assessment investigates a program’s credibility, feasibility, sustainability, and assesses the likelihood that the stated objectives are being met.)

Data from 19 interviews of key national and state Extension/4-H leaders (ten administrators, nine program leaders). Their perceptions of 4-H International Exchange programs can be summarized as:

- A positive experience in developing youth
- Out of touch with 4-H program goals & curriculum
- A low priority of the Extension/4-H system
- Lacking curriculum, educational content, resources (human and financial).

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The results reaffirmed that the program: **1) had unclear goals and objectives, 2) lacked human and financial resources, and 3) lacked systemic and organizational support.** Two quotes from interviews summed up the status of 4-H International Programs: **“Get with it and go or get out!”** and **“Stop talking, start doing.”**

4. **1993 - Arlin Etling, Prof. at Penn State University, Kimberly K. Reaman, Wisconsin 4-H Agent, and Gwen El Sawi** collaborated on an article **“Overcoming Barriers to a Global Outlook in 4-H”**.
Etling, A., Reaman, K. K., & El Sawi, G. (1993). Overcoming Barriers to a Global Outlook in 4-H. *The Journal of Extension*, 31(2), Article 13. <https://open.clemson.edu/joe/vol31/iss2/13>

This article looks at the impact of international opportunities at the county level, the barriers, and the benefits of international opportunities. **Reaman’s** study of international programming delivered by county 4-H professionals identified several problems for effective programming in global citizenship.

The greatest barriers were: **1) expense**, especially for trips (exchanges) out of the country, **2) lack of a clearly defined project; agents’ resistance** to international activities, and **3) problems with state program leadership**, i.e., Communications, unrealistic deadlines, limited opportunities for volunteers and staff, scheduling, evaluation, and procedures.

Additional perceptual barriers included: 1) **war and recession** greatly affected agents' attitudes about global citizenship, and 2) the **“image” of international 4-H in the past** was viewed as an impediment to participation in global citizenship programs.

Recommendations included:

- ◆ **Offer inexpensive alternatives to international travel.** Promote activities that do not require international travel, including camps, workshops, global recognition nights, pen pals, sister clubs, country studies, speakers, movies, and simulation games.
- ◆ Agents, specialists, and administrators need to be **aware of county agents’ negative perceptions about international programming. Expand in-service training for professionals and volunteers.**
- ◆ **Use advisory committees** to help implement clear and consistent communication at all levels of the program.
- ◆ **Procedures must be simplified, clarified, and unified.**
- ◆ **Implement a risk management system** (Oregon was cited as an example).
- ◆ **Expand and diversify the international curriculum with emphasis on learning about cultures and developing country and cross-cultural learning, foster cross-cultural understanding and communication within this country, in addition to other cultures around the world.**
- ◆ **“The term “international” should be replaced with “global citizenship” when speaking about 4-H and youth programming. When we speak about “global education”, we should be speaking of a curriculum that helps youth gain life skills and understanding. "Youth exchanges are just one of many activities that may comprise that curriculum”.**

The article concluded stating, **“Preparing people to live in a global society has become a necessary component of citizenship education. Extension has the capacity to play a vital role in developing competent citizens. It can help youth become self-directed, productive, and contributing members of their community, whether local, national, or global.”**

5. **2000 - May Elizabeth Williams** completed an **“Evaluation of the International 4-H Youth Exchange (IFYE) Program”**, her Master’s Thesis at West Virginia University. The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which the IFYE Program achieved its objectives regarding positive cross-cultural attitudes, life skills, and host culture knowledge through the six-month IFYE Program.

Twenty-one 1999 IFYE’s completed pre- and post-exchange descriptive survey evaluations while attending the program orientation and debriefings. The major finding of this study was IFYE’s significant gain in host culture

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knowledge. Positive cross-cultural perceptions existed before their exchange experience; however, the experience resulted in greater appreciation for the U.S. Strengthened awareness of world issues, improved communication skills, and overcame misperceptions about their host country. They also developed leadership skills, but not to the extent they originally expected.

Notable findings included: **1) IFYE representatives changed their attitude about the importance of learning a foreign language from important to less important** as “most everyone spoke English”. (*Author’s note: most countries require English language proficiency as part of the host family requirements.*) **2) IFYE’s also responded that they felt participation helped develop positive communication between cultures.** **3) All 21 participants “Strongly Agreed” that it is important to know about world issues.** **4) Participants indicated more than “Moderate Gain” in 57% of the 35 life skills evaluated.** **5) They also evaluated their level of Life Skill growth as less than they had anticipated, and 77% of the Life Skills statements had lower scores after the exchange.** The only life skill indicating more development than expected was the ability to select alternatives. (*Author’s note: This is really interesting to ponder and needs further study and insight.*)

Key recommendations made from this study included suggestions for **further research.** “and that the **objectives of 4-H International Programs should be clarified** in order to make effective evaluations more feasible.”

6. **2001 - Barry L. Boyd**, a Professor at Texas A&M University, asked a research team from the Eisenhower Leadership Program (Christie Giebler, Matthew Hince, Yaru Liu, Neha Mehta, Ryan Rash, Jennifer Rowald, Carllos Saldana, and Yvonne Yanta) to assess the impact of participation in the IFYE program titled: **"Does Study Abroad Make a Difference: An Impact Assessment of the International 4-H Youth Exchange Program."**

“The Team surveyed all former IFYE participants from Texas, their family members, and friends. The findings indicate those surveyed were **1) more interested in global events, and 2) more involved in community activities because of the exchange program.**

Participants described the exchange as a life-changing event and cited **financial barriers to participation** that can be overcome by seeking corporate support and by more effective promotion.

This study affirms many of the same results from previously cited assessments.

7. **2004 - Mary E. Arnold**, Oregon State University 4-H Youth Development Specialist, presented the results of a national evaluation of the 4-H Japanese exchange program: **“Personal and Life Skill Development through Participation in the 4-H Japanese Exchange Program.”** in The Journal of Extension (2004) Volume 42(6).
Arnold, M. E. (2004). Personal and Life Skill Development Through Participation in the 4-H Japanese Exchange Program. *The Journal of Extension*, 42(6), Article 16. <https://open.clemson.edu/joe/vol42/iss6/16>

This evaluation looked at the impact of participation in the program on **personal and life skill development in youth** who traveled to Japan or served as a host to an international youth visiting the U.S. from Japan. “The results indicate that participation in the program has significant impact on personal and life skill development in youth, whether they travel to Japan or serve as host. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed few significant differences in development between youth who traveled to Japan and youth who served as hosts.”

Her review of other studies “indicated that **youth develop important life and personal skills through program participation.**” **Sakamoto (2003)** reported language development, cross-cultural understanding, cultural sensitivity, a global perspective, and increased tolerance as **outcomes of international homestay programs.**

Stitsworth (1988) found that U.S. Youth participating in the 4-H Japanese exchange were more flexible, independent, sociable, and responsible.

Likewise, **Crealock (1993)** found that language development, cross-cultural understanding, and personal development were some of the **main outcomes for Japanese youth** participating in a Canadian homestay program.

The development of these skills is consistent with the program goals for the 4-H program, which focus on the development of life and personal skills."

Arnold concludes "The 4-H program has long recognized the benefit of developing life and personal skills through hands-on learning opportunities in real-world situations. "This study shows that **"bringing the world"** to youth has many of the same benefits as sending youth **"out to the world"**. That is there are similar outcomes from hosting an exchange student as there is from being an outbound participant.

8. 2014 - Ten years later, **Arnold** collaborated with **Jamie Davis** and **Aimee L. Corliss**, from Oregon State University, published an article in the Journal of Youth Development (Volume 9, Number 2 Summer 2014) titled: "**From 4-H International Youth Exchange to Global Citizen: Common Pathways of Ten Past Program Participants.**" <https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/view/62>

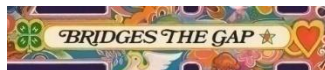
"This qualitative study examined the life course of adults who participated as youth in the 4-H International Exchange program. This research was to explore the pathways that led each participant to their exchange experience as a youth and **how that experience set the stage for further development** into an adulthood marked by cultural interest, awareness, competence, and global citizenship. ... The results of this research contribute to the articulation of a theory of change upon which international youth exchange programs can be effectively developed and enhanced. It also offered specific recommendations for international youth exchange programs."

Recommendations from this research included:

1. It is important for participants to authentically **share their excitement and enthusiasm** for the program to encourage others to experience another culture through living with a host family. The program is an experience that cannot be gained through a visit as a tourist.
2. **Hosting youth from another culture should be encouraged** as it serves as a catalyst for further cross-cultural understanding and learning more about countries.
3. **Quality of the host family matters.** It is critical that the family be welcoming and warm, that they are willing to provide an authentic experience for cultural events, activities, and share their family life and culture.
4. **Connect youth to additional opportunities post-exchange.** Encourage additional exchanges and internships as many participants were eager to extend and expand their international experiences.
5. **Youth should be exposed to international career opportunities** as many careers do now and will increasingly include an international dimension.
6. **Youth should be encouraged to follow and expand their interests in other people, places, languages, and cultures.**

I have tried to provide an overview of the studies that have been reviewed. In most cases, I've taken from the abstracts of the papers, used some AI summaries to examine the content, and shared a sampling of findings and recommendations. I have tried to describe the findings and recommendations in such a way as to be helpful to others who are assessing and implementing 4-H International programs. The next article will summarize and synthesize these historical studies, findings, and recommendations, and examine existing program objectives to identify changes over time and highlight what is happening currently that relates to research and evidence found in the studies.

Gwen El Sawi, PhD, IFYE MN-India 1969, Minnesota State 4-H Staff Assistant, National 4-H Council - Director of Experiential Education (1974-1993 Citizenship and International Programs), UMD PHD student 1994-1997 (Workforce Skills and Competencies in 4-H Literature), USDA/USAID Workforce and Youth Development Specialist (1998-2006), Workforce and Youth Development Consultant



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4-H Fun FACT

To our knowledge, no President of the United States has yet been a 4-H alum.

However, in 1911, **Harry S Truman**, who became our 33rd president in 1945, organized the first **Farm Club for Boys and Girls** in western Missouri¹ making Truman a 4-H Volunteer. By the way, “Farm Club for Boys and Girls” was one of the various names that were used for 4-H Clubs before 4-H Clubs were called 4-H Clubs.



Steinberg, Alfred. *The man From Missouri. The Life and Times of Harry S. Truman*. (NY: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1962) p 33
Photo Credit: Frank Gatteri. U.S. Army. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum.

Tell Us Your 4-H History Story

Share your photos and stories of the history YOU made in 4-H!

We know you've made 4-H History. So, tell us about it! The world wants to know YOUR 4-H history!
Send your articles to: Editor@4-HHistory.com Submissions should be approximately 500 words.

Thanks for reading The BRIDGE. Look for our next issue August 15, 2025!



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