Achieving the Extension Mission Through Volunteers Course
Impact Study

North Central Region 4-H Volunteer Specialists

Achieving the Extension Mission Through Volunteers (AEMTV) is a national online cohort course developed for Extension professionals. Participants in the course engage with content to increase volunteer leadership and management competencies. Since 2015, 940 Extension professionals from 40 states representing multiple program areas have taken the course.

In 2019, the AEMTV Impact Study was conducted through an electronic survey of 379 course participants. **One hundred-fifty-four** individuals from **17 states** (IL, IN, KS, ME, MI, MN, MO, NE, NM, NC, ND, OH, SD, VT, WV, WI and WY) **completed the survey for a 40.6% response rate** (analyzed 127 responses after data cleaning).

> (The course) "provides a solid framework to approach volunteer management. It is the only course like it for Extension professionals. It gives great ideas and a great path for colleagues to follow as they work with volunteers at many stages. It professionalizes aspects of this work in an important way." - Wisconsin

Study Purpose:
- Document the volunteer systems knowledge gained
- Assess to what extent participants applied what they learned
- Assess the impact of a cohort-based online learning experience

Program Area Participants:
- Positive Youth Development / 4-H – 85
- Agriculture – 24
- Family Living / Health & Well-Being – 6
- Natural Resources – 2
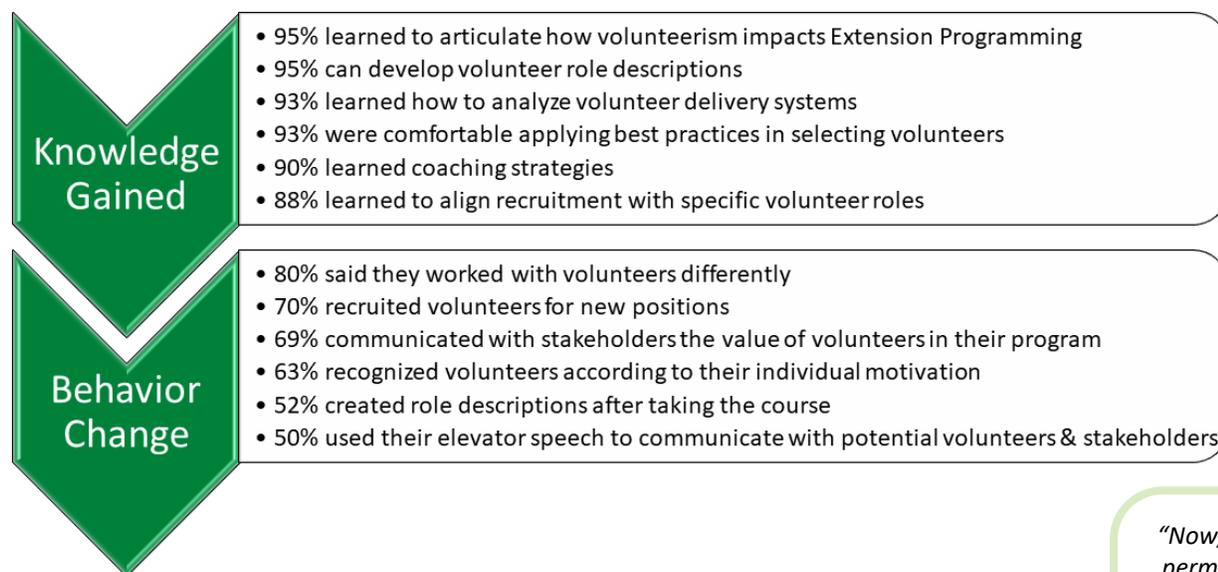- No Response – 10

Extension Experience:
- < 1 year – 15 participants
- 1-5 years – 54 participants
- 6-10 years – 10 participants
- 11-20 years – 30 participants
- > 20 years – 7 participants
- No Response – 11

> **AEMTV is making a difference! Extension professionals are increasing both their knowledge and ability to work with volunteers.**

Knowledge Gained
- 95% learned to articulate how volunteerism impacts Extension Programming
- 95% can develop volunteer role descriptions
- 93% learned how to analyze volunteer delivery systems
- 93% were comfortable applying best practices in selecting volunteers
- 90% learned coaching strategies
- 88% learned to align recruitment with specific volunteer roles

Behavior Change
- 80% said they worked with volunteers differently
- 70% recruited volunteers for new positions
- 69% communicated with stakeholders the value of volunteers in their program
- 63% recognized volunteers according to their individual motivation
- 52% created role descriptions after taking the course
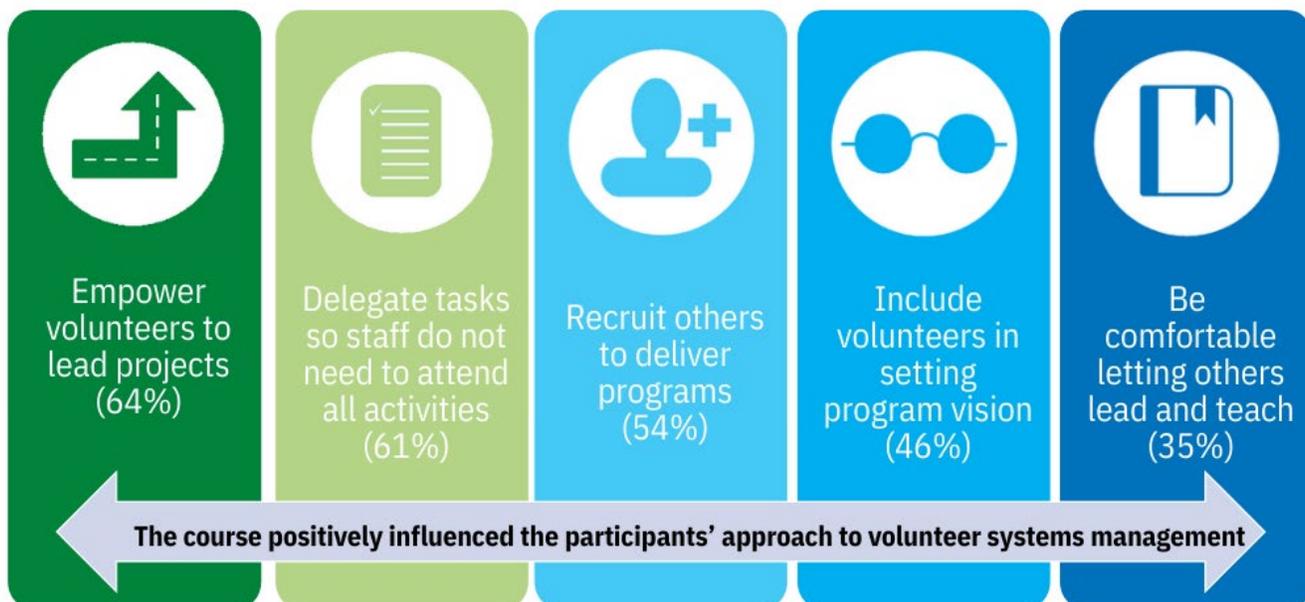- 50% used their elevator speech to communicate with potential volunteers & stakeholders

Application:
The course positively influenced how professionals work with volunteers to build capacity in Extension programs. After taking the course, participants described a shift in their leadership to:
- Give volunteers responsibility to teach programs
- Engage volunteers in dialogue and program decisions
- Empower volunteers to lead major programs

> "Now, I give myself permission to step back to allow others to lead. I used to feel guilty because I thought it was my job alone to lead." - North Dakota

| Empower volunteers to lead projects (64%) | Delegate tasks so staff do not need to attend all activities (61%) | Recruit others to deliver programs (54%) | Include volunteers in setting program vision (46%) | Be comfortable letting others lead and teach (35%) |

The course positively influenced the participants' approach to volunteer systems management

Impact of Online Professional Development:
The online cohort-based learning environment is an effective platform for Extension professionals to develop their skills in managing volunteer systems. The design consists of self-study and group learning opportunities, including video presentations, articles, educational activities, webinars, and discussion boards.

> *"This course opened my eyes to things that I had forgotten when I first started my work in Extension, it reminded me to look at the whole picture and gave me a lot of brand-new information. The lessons were amazing in teaching, repeating and practical experience."*
> - Vermont

Two key aspects emerged that support the cohort online learning environment:

1. Access to learning. Online learning reduces barriers many Extension professionals experience with limited funding, distance to training, and time away from work responsibilities.
2. Networking. Participants benefit from learning and sharing with colleagues across program areas and Extension systems.

Participants increased knowledge and applied volunteer systems practices as a result of their involvement in the Achieving the Extension Mission Through Volunteers online cohort course. Extension professionals are working with volunteers in new ways to build capacity in Extension programs.

> *"The course design, along with information through the online platform provide a valuable opportunity to learn around volunteer systems and key dimensions, with others who are working with volunteers to gain additional perspectives and a broader network of colleagues."* - Minnesota

Extension Research Team

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