4-H Ambassadors Communicating
“The Best Kept Secret”

The Situation
4-H has often been referred to as the “best kept secret in town.” Getting the word out that 4-H is not only thriving, but making a positive impact on kids is news that should be shared in every county.

Many changes have taken place in 4-H over the last forty years. In the past, 4-H targeted and reached rural youth. Key leaders in rural America know about and support 4-H but many leaders in urban America are unaware of the impact that 4-H has on youth. Some key changes:
- A large sector of 4-H’s audience comes from urban America.
- There has been increased emphasis on serving minority audiences.
- Key community leaders have commonly heard about 4-H but really don’t know 4-H.
- Youth development has become a national priority.
- There is a genuine challenge to receive public funding for 4-H.

These key changes need to be communicated to program stakeholders.

Our Response
The Idaho 4-H Ambassador program is one way to turn the “best kept secret” into public knowledge. The role of ambassador is very important and one to be taken very seriously. Ambassadors must be at least 14 years old and have completed at least two years of 4-H. Ambassadors are called on to serve as primary spokespersons for the 4-H program at the county level. That role may include giving a speech to civic groups, handing out programs at an event, speaking on radio/video or hosting a group or activity.

The Idaho 4-H Ambassador Training Program offers youth the opportunity to represent the local 4-H organization as well as develop leadership, communication and team skills. They receive training in public speaking, leadership development, working in teams and fundraising.

Program Outcomes
During the past 19 years over 550 youth have participated in the 4-H Ambassador program. In November 2005, the program had its largest number of youth since its inception. Over 85 youth and 15 adults participated in the training. One particular objective of the training is for youth to gain the skills to articulate the impact that 4-H has had on their lives and to be able to communicate that impact to stakeholders. All 85 youth gave a three minute speech sharing the impact of 4-H on their lives. Below are some of the themes and supporting quotes that emerged from the youth speeches:

Development of Life Skills
- “Responsibility, leadership skills, and social skills are tools 4-H has given me for the future.”
- “4-H opens doors for you to try new things and meet new people. It isn’t just about animals. It’s about leadership.”
“With my dad overseas, I’ve had to take all the responsibility of my animals on myself. You don’t realize how much you’ve learned until you have to do it all yourself.”

**Significant Adult Relationship/Mentor**
- “[My leader] taught me leadership, independence, and how to always strive for the best.”
- “Tonya has always been there with advice, help, and support for all my special events, just like a parent.”
- “Ask yourself what makes your heart come alive, and do that. 4-H has given me new horizons. It’s the adults that make it happen.”
- “I was just another kid until an adult encouraged me, and even signed up as a leader so I would join.”

**Self Efficacy**
- “Even if you’re a loser at school, in 4-H you’re cool.”
- “Before 4-H, I didn’t fit in and felt insignificant. Now I have a place, and I am who I want to be.”
- “I was a shy little girl, but now I can stand in front of a group of people and not faint.”

The themes developed and quotes shared by 4-H Ambassadors relate directly to the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets. These assets have the power during critical adolescent years to influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults (retrieved August 28, 2006, http://www.search-institute.org/assets). The 4-H Ambassador program not only enhances these assets but also builds the skills that allow youth to articulate assets gained.

**The Future**
The 4-H Ambassador program will continue to impact youth, however additional data need to be collected to measure the impact on stakeholders. Future goals of the program include increasing partnerships and collaborations with state businesses and communities to increase funding sources.