

Society Programming

Illinois 4-H History Project Launch *University of Illinois*

Objective or purpose of project:

To engage in conversation, build brand awareness, and network with 4-H alumni and friends during the Illinois State Fair for the launch of the Illinois 4-H History Project to gather stories about how 4-H made an impact in their lives. To create a new Illinois 4-H timeline to highlight the chronological order of important historical 4-H events, programming, and milestones in Illinois 4-H history.

Audience:

Illinois State Fair attendees, 4-H families, and guests attending the Illinois State Fair and visiting the Orr Building during the three days of state-level 4-H General Project judging.

Project Outcome:

The launch of the Illinois 4-H History project was a first-time effort to showcase Illinois 4-H during the Illinois State Fair and beyond to engage alumni, build connections and develop opportunities to identify alumni and the impact 4-H made on their lives. The interactive booth and display launched the theme “What’s Your 4-H Story?” to engage alumni in attendance and virtually to share their 4-H memories. A comprehensive Illinois 4-H History timeline was also developed for the program. Notebooks and pens were provided as giveaways to encourage the storytelling aspect beyond the Illinois State Fair. Alumni were invited to participate after the Illinois State Fair in “4-H By the Decades Reunions” to share their 4-H stories more in depth and identify the changes in 4-H through the decades of Illinois 4-H. 4-H Alumni have also shared many memorabilia items including record books, awards, photos, projects to showcase in a future display or history website. This project has truly launched an alumni in a multi-year alumni engagement project to gather 4-H history and stories of how 4-H has changed and the impact it made on youth engaged in the program.

What makes this project exceptional?

The State 4-H Office administrative staff and alumni staff first met to discuss the exhibit’s goals and develop themes to focus on to engage with 4-H alumni and gather their stories during the Illinois State Fair at the Illinois 4-H Alumni Association “welcome booth.” The goals included developing a new Illinois 4-H History timeline and focusing on four themes that 4-H youth develop during their 4-H experiences, including Project Skills, Leadership, Community Service, and Creating Lifetime Connections and Networking. With these goals in mind, research was conducted for several weeks at the University of Illinois archives and within Illinois 4-H archive files to review programmatic start dates and 4-H historical data and seek historical photos to showcase Illinois 4-H from “then to now.” We wanted the images to emotionally engage 4-H alumni as they walked through the exhibit to find a common connection between the photos displayed to their 4-H experiences and to invoke their 4-H memories and 4-H story. These materials were sorted and outlined to develop the Illinois 4-H historical timeline. Photos were then sorted and categorized by themes to showcase on the banners. Another large banner backdrop was added to the booth layout development to showcase 4-H historical photos in black and white to current images to announce the overall theme of “What is your 4-H story?” With the backdrop of our booth area developed, we then focused on the “calls to action” we hoped to gather from those visiting us at the Illinois State Fair.

