



# RESEARCH PROJECT OUTLINE

Research and Graduate Education ♦ College of Agricultural Sciences  
The Pennsylvania State University ♦ University Park, Pennsylvania

**Title:** Leadership Development of Youth and Adults

**Probable Duration:** 60 months (July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2012)

**Personnel:**

*Project Investigator(s):*

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**Justification, Relevance, and Expected Outcomes or Impacts:**

A growing need for leadership development is evident in the shifting demographics of today's society, as well as in the changing nature of the social and economic issues people are asked to address. The United States is facing inevitable change as literal and figurative landscapes evolve to accommodate new needs of the population. Responsibilities including education and resource management once handled by state and federal governments are being turned over to local governments and community organizations. This increased responsibility equates a need for all residents to assume positions of leadership, if they are to succeed in this increasingly competitive environment. Individuals within communities must develop the skills and capacity to work in collaborative groups to address complex problems and improve the quality of life. Community leaders are needed who understand the nature and intricacies of rural life. Research has shown that "communities where public life is vibrant have very different kinds of leaders, and a great many of them." Leadership development must occur, not only with adults but with young people as well, so that a great many individuals will be prepared to meet the challenges of the future within our more global society.

**Previous Work (Background) and Present Outlook:**

**Youth Leadership Development**

*"Leadership is much more than being elected or appointed to a position, it is acquired most effectively through practice." Karnes & Bean (1990, p.3)*

Previous research by van Linden & Fertman (Fertman & Long, 1990; Fertman & Chubb, 1993; Wald & Pringle, 1995; Long, Wald & Graf, 1996) lead them to identify five dimensions of leadership that include cognitive, emotional and behavioral components (van Linden & Fertman, 1998). The authors propose that these five dimensions provide a framework to assess, monitor, and evaluate the leadership development of adolescents. The five dimensions of leadership are, leadership information, leadership attitude, communication skills, decision-making skills and stress-management skills. Additionally, van Linden & Fertman (1998) divided each dimension into transformational and transactional leadership development skills, opportunities and activities.

As youth develop leadership skills it is important to remember that this is a dynamic, complex, and often situational process. van Linden & Fertman (1998) propose the development of leadership in adolescents is also a social process that is developed through interventions between people, activities, and learning experiences as youth interact with their families, communities, schools, and workplaces. Depending on the

level, degree of interaction, and context in which a program, experience or activity is delivered, it may determine the level of mastery or acquisition of leadership development skills and abilities.

Finally, there exists a need to determine or assess an individual's stage of leadership development. Depending on the situation or task youth may move from an advanced level back to a developmental stage of leadership. This situational leadership approach is valuable when determining the leadership activities, tasks and expectations for youth. van Linden & Fertman (1998) have identified three stages of leadership development: *awareness*, in which individuals begin to see themselves as leaders; *interaction*, where youth expand their leadership skills and abilities; and *mastery*, where youth learned and mastered leadership skills and activities.

This project is designed to assess and evaluate activities, opportunities, programmatic and individual variables that contribute to the development of leadership skills for youth.

### **Rural Community Leadership**

Sadly, many of today's rural areas are in trouble. Issues facing rural communities range from decline (the loss of family farms and small farming communities resulting in ever-dwindling populations that may not be able to actively support a community) to rapid growth (and how to protect the surrounding environment and small-town culture). Furthermore, demographic shifts and economic restructuring threaten to dramatically alter the lives of rural people and their communities (Brown, Swanson, & Barton, 2003). Today's rural communities, on average, differ more from each other than urban areas (Flora & Flora, 2004). Therefore, addressing these problems will be particularly complex; a "one size fits all" approach will not be effective.

Within many rural communities today, local leaders are concluding that if economic and community development is to occur, it is their responsibility to make it happen (Bell & Evert, 1997). In areas such as public education and job training, technology, networking with state and regional agencies, health care, leadership and strategic planning, communities are learning that community development is not the responsibility of any one group, but a community-wide effort.

Furthermore, many argue that leadership may be the catalyst through which these changes occur. Communities that are creative, entrepreneurial, and committed to building a shared vision and consensus are found to be better prepared to address community needs (Bell & Evert, 1997). For rural communities to remain, there is a call for local leadership to take charge and guide the way into the future. A new generation of leaders is needed to build local partnerships for managing change in today's diverse communities (Tabb & Montesi, 2000).

Even more importantly for the future of today's rural communities is the presence and action of leaders who can "fit it all together." Positioning a community for a viable future does not just mean being able to solve complex problems and move the community towards successful social action, which leads to planned change, but also means motivating community members to develop social capital, increase individual well-being, sustain the community's unique culture and relate to the changing demographics that are a reality of rural communities. This is the complex side of community leadership.

### **International Aspects of Leadership**

Today's world is a global society. Through ever-advancing communications and technology, the Internet, and other modern conveniences, individuals can connect with each other across states, countries and even continents. These advances have changed how society interacts forever; as a result, it is imperative that today's students and future employees have useful global perspectives and competencies. Graduates should not only be able to work with diverse cultures and people, but should also have a good grasp on issues and events that affect people worldwide (Irani, Place, & Friedel, 2006).

As such, the ability to develop competent, principle-based leadership is a major challenge facing businesses in today's culturally diverse, global society (Marsh & Johnson, 2005). Many of today's students do not have the knowledge or skills to effectively lead within a global setting. According to Irani, Place and Friedel (2006), employers of colleges of agriculture graduates expect their future hires to have the diverse knowledge, skills

and understanding that equip them to work in the global workplaces of today. In addition, the need for internationally aware students is demonstrated through our security, trade and cultural relations with other countries. These forces need globally savvy leaders, given that "...one in six U.S. jobs is directly tied to international trade" (Bruening & Shao, 2005, p. 48).

But how do today's students – tomorrow's leaders deal with these issues? More importantly, how can we effectively provide the right tools in order to develop these leaders of tomorrow?

For all of these reasons, it is imperative that today's leadership students are exposed to leadership training and development that integrates more contemporary international perspectives and issues.

### **Objectives:**

1. To assess the contribution of leadership development programs to the development of leadership skills, including decision-making, critical thinking, problem solving, goal-setting and communication.
2. To measure the impact of youth leadership development and skill mastery within the family, community, school and work place.
3. To evaluate existing resources, programmatic factors and opportunities available to youth and adults as they relate to the development and mastery of leadership skills and styles.
4. To define a primary set of necessary leadership skills for rural community leaders, in order to determine salient intervention and interaction variables.
5. To examine the role that a global society plays in the leadership development of youth and adults.

### **Procedures:**

To implement and complete this project multiple procedures are planned. The procedures are presented under each of the projects main objectives. The type of statistics will be determined by the limitations of the data. This project will utilize both quantitative and qualitative approaches for data collection and analysis.

**Objective 1-** To assess the contribution of leadership development programs to the development of leadership skills, including decision-making, critical thinking, problem solving, goal-setting and communication.

What is the result of leadership development programs? What impact are they producing in terms of skill development? What role does the training environment play in the acquisition of skills? These are all questions being addressed under this objective. Strategies to address this objective include interviews (Patton, 2002), participant observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and questionnaires (Dillman 2000), designed to evaluate the efficacy of leadership training environments and the effectiveness of the leadership development training/event.

One specific example of this assessment is the use of the Skills for Everyday Living evaluation tool; youth enrolled in the 4-H program will complete the survey tool annually with their enrollment forms. The data will be entered online and analyses provided directly to the extension educator. They are able to run reports with frequencies on pre-surveys to assess needs and provide program direction. Reports using matched paired t-tests assess change in individuals or groups over time. The contribution of the 4-H program to increase in leadership life skill development can be assessed. In addition, youth professionals can more clearly communicate the value of the 4-H program to legislators, agencies, parents and other stakeholders.

**Objective 2-** To measure the impact of youth leadership development and skill mastery within the family, community, school and work place.

The ultimate goal of this objective is to measure the impact of youth leadership development and skill mastery within the family, community, school, and work place. Achievement, recognition, and competence in leadership related events, practices and activities will document the level of mastery achieved. This will be accomplished by the use of self-reported questionnaires and interviews.

**Objective 3** – To evaluate existing resources, programmatic factors and opportunities available to youth and adults as they relate to the development and mastery of leadership skills and styles.

Leadership programs must first, and foremost address the needs of the individuals enrolled and the communities in which they live. In order to provide the best possible programs and resources for constituents, both youth and adults, under this objective, a review of existing leadership based curricula, programmatic events and activities, conferences, and professional development opportunities available for youth and adults to assess critical leadership development characteristics will be undertaken.

**Objective 4** – To define a primary set of necessary leadership skills for rural community leaders, in order to determine salient intervention and interaction variables.

In order to address this objective one needs to investigate multiple facets of leadership development from a rural community perspective including how it relates to the growing emphasis and opportunities on the bioenergy sector. Self reported questionnaires, focus groups, individual interviews, and Delphi techniques will be used with individuals currently in leadership positions (referential and positional) to develop a primary set of necessary leadership skills for rural community leaders. Results will lead to the development of training and interventions to enhance the capacity of rural communities to develop leaders for the future.

**Objective 5** - To examine the role and the impact that a global society plays in the leadership development of youth and adults.

Due to the ever expanding nature of our global society it becomes increasingly apparent that it is necessary to examine the role played by and impact of international awareness on leadership development. Techniques to carry out this examination will include Delphi, surveys, interviews and focus groups of individuals, both American and International. Results will determine the role and impact that international experiences and exposure play in leadership development.

**Stakeholder Engagement:**

County based educators and their clientele, agricultural science teachers and their students, rural communities members, university students and faculty. All of these groups/individuals will be stakeholders in this project, insomuch as the outcomes of this project will have an impact on programs, educational methods, and curriculum utilized by these individuals. In terms of evaluation, they will be evaluating the output of the project(s), and not the project itself.

**Scope of Impact:**

This is a state specific project, however, the researchers may collaborate with other states/countries insomuch as they would be able to provide direction or information germane to a specific component of the various project objectives.

**Integrated Activities:**

In terms of outreach/extension audiences, this project will directly effect programming, curriculum, and delivery of extension programs related to leadership. In that way, this project is directly tied to extension.

**Milestones:**

Will include but are not limited to publishing of research in scholarly journals, at professional meetings, and trade journals where appropriate, the development and evaluation of new and existing extension programs/curriculum, agricultural science leadership activities, and College of Agricultural Science leadership programs.

**Literature Cited:**

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