The Need for a Gender Neutrality Policy in One State's 4-H Program

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The Need for a Gender Neutrality Policy in One State’s 4-H Program

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The Need for a Gender Neutrality Policy in One State’s 4-H Program

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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ABSTRACT

Policies recognizing gender-neutrality and non-binary identities are needed in youth development programs to create a truly inclusive program and a sense of belonging for all youth. This study explored if and how written statewide policies regarding gender-neutrality can most effectively serve members, agents, and volunteers of the 4-H Youth Development Program in the state under study. The context of this study was the 4-H program in one state (agents and administrators as participants) and 4-H programs around the United States (administrators as participants). Preliminary qualitative and quantitative data from my research study indicated that agents in the state under study recognized an immediate need for written policies regarding gender neutrality, but the administrators did not. Agents working with youth expressed concerns about professional development, guidance, and written guidelines, but administrators had not produced any over several years. Administrators indicated that they were handling issues as they came up and had made the program inclusive. The lack of members identifying or known as transgender, non-binary, or gender-questioning contradicted the administrators’ statements of a welcome and inclusive environment. A notable disconnect existed between what county agents indicated was needed and wanted, and what administrators stated should be provided. Based on data and analysis, I recommended a statewide written policy was necessary to create a truly inclusive, equal opportunity 4-H Youth Development Program in the state under study.
PREFACE

Growing up first in the north and then in the south, I always surrounded myself with a diverse group of people, not those conforming to a clique. My friends were from the football team, the chess club, the honors classes, and special needs programs. To me, people were different from each other, but no one group was better than another.

When I began working with victims of violent crimes, my passion for supporting others grew substantially. Victims and survivors felt shame and blame; the last thing they wanted to do was tell others what happened. I wanted people to treat them with respect and understanding without knowing their stories. When children acted up, acted out, or acted strange, it would be appropriate for adults to think, “I wonder what they are reacting to and how can I help?” I taught many groups of teachers, law enforcement officers, and medical personnel to look beyond the action to the possible reasons and causes.

After 15 years, my life and career changed, and I began working in youth development and volunteer management. It became apparent that the programs attracted mostly White youth from rural areas and were associated with farming and livestock. The programs were, however, assisting socioeconomically disadvantaged families and, in so doing, served youth from underserved racial populations, primarily in our camping program. In addition, I worked with differently-abled youth to find ways for them to succeed in 4-H project work.

In the early 2000s, I found myself and others beginning to ask, how can we attract and accommodate children who identify as homosexual to the residential camps? Twenty years later, there are no written policies or even clear answers. In recent years, I’ve added
questions about transgender, non-binary youth and leaders are doing to make the program inclusive, welcoming, and accommodating, regardless of any differences. I am not alone in asking, but this research represents a step closer to getting answers. My goal is to collect the expressed needs, gather the data, and work with agents and administrators to create the written documents that will answer the questions. Creating a fully inclusive, unbridled program where all youth can work, play, learn, and grow together begins with this research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A handful of people made this journey a worthwhile success, and I am forever in their debt. It began with my firm, independent daughters, Jodi and Sara, who supported and encouraged me to begin this program and repeatedly told me to stop putting it off. They called me out on my excuses and challenged my fears. Without their strength and support, I would never have taken the first step. To Jodi, for creating a quiet place when needed and being a rock when I reached for stability. To Sara, my dreamer, who offered me a place to stay for those out-of-town events. She provides a different perspective and listens with her heart.

To Drs. Sparks and Butler, an immense thank you for believing in me when I did not and providing the foundation and the push to make this possible. Your positive attitude and kind words did more for me than you will ever realize. Dr. Sparks, your ENERGY! emails often hit home, and I would visit that file regularly. Dr. Butler, your willingness to share, listen, and respond at all hours kept me on track. You met me where I needed you to be and kept me from running away. All my NLU professors contributed to my body of knowledge and growth somehow, and I appreciate all of you.

To my co-workers, thank you for supporting my efforts. I appreciate those of you who shared with me by completing the survey, being interviewed, or just sharing your opinions and ideas in a conversation. You provided the data that allowed me to finish the research and start the hard work.

Finally, to my cohort, some of you challenged me when I tried to skimp, and others set a high bar where I wanted to join you. You made this journey much more pleasant for the comic relief, the shared files, and the honest opinions, and I thank you!
DEDICATION

This dissertation and the work behind it are dedicated to two different groups. First, to my family, the foundation to my everything. My late husband Jeffrey always pushed me forward and stood by my crazy hours and passionate ideas. My daughters, Jodi and Sara, who are strong and independent, constantly remind me to take care of and be true to myself and for helping me when I am stuck or in need of anything, including a sounding board. For my grandchildren, I hope the message is clear; be whoever you are and be proud of yourself. Every day, no matter what, be kind and accepting of others for who they are, and never look to change anyone to who you think they should be.

Second, to every young person out there struggling to fit in and find where they belong, do not be ashamed of what you feel and be honest with yourself in life. If at first you are not accepted, move on! Honesty and authenticity are essential words to embrace. Do not compromise your truth for others. Everyone belongs here and should never have to hide to feel safe. Hold your head high and see the world from your vantage point because that is the most important one for you.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The 4-H program, a youth program established in 1904 by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture of the United States Department of Agriculture, is the largest youth development organization in the nation. In the state under study, 4-H was formally adopted in 1909 and, at the time of this study, had 230,000 members, a portion of America's 6.5 million youth members. Several other countries have 4-H programs, including Iraq, the Bahamas, and Haiti.

The mission of the 4-H program in the state under study was to use a learn-by-doing approach and relationships with caring adults to help youth gain the knowledge and skills needed to be productive and responsible citizens (citation withheld to protect the confidentiality, 2019). Programming in 4-H focused on three primary program areas: science, citizenship, and healthy living. County agents and state specialists offered individual and team competitions, judging contests, environmental camps, and project work to help the youth learn and continually develop necessary life skills and gain experiences to build character.

The 4-H program has many levels of administration, both nationally and within each state’s Land Grant University. Ultimately, in the state under study, 4-H policies and related decisions were handed down from the State Program Leader, assisted by an Assistant Program Leader and a team of Regional Specialized Agents. The work in the counties, with the youth and volunteers, was done by the County 4-H Agent under direct supervision from the County Extension Director.

In the state under study, 4-H served youth ages 5-18, and the demographics of the program were in line with the state demographics. The US census statistics for the state under study showed a population of 51% female, 77% White, 17% Black, 2% reporting more than one race, and 26% Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The 4-H reports for 2018-2019 indicated
they were 50% female, 72% White, 19% Black, 5% reporting more than one race, and 22% Hispanic (citation withheld to protect the confidentiality, 2019). While the program could show diversity and parity as required by Affirmative Action laws and policies, there was no evidence that it was inclusive to all populations beyond race and ethnicity.

The establishment of gender-neutral environments was a topic in administrative conversations in 4-H programs. Agents had asked about policies regarding gender identification, transgender youth, or nonbinary participants (persons choosing not to identify within a two-gender system). Housing for overnight programming, bathroom designations, and counselor assignments were all areas the agents faced, while at the same time they felt they lacked guidance from their program leaders. As of the time of this study, no answers or policies were in place to address this issue.

These were emerging issues, and they were infiltrating the 4-H program. When an Iowa 4-H program leader attempted to initiate policies of inclusion, the program leader was dismissed from their position immediately (Sorace, 2018; Crowder, 2018). A California 4-H administrative team was able to successfully create a guiding document, but the team had not formally established a policy at the time of this study.

**Purpose of the Program Evaluation**

The purpose of my study was to determine if there was a need for a 4-H gender neutrality policy and related guidelines for the 4-H program in the state under study. In addition, I was trying to determine whether administrators and agents were interpreting the current non-discrimination statements, policies, and laws to include gender identity. Finally, I was also determining if a difference existed between the expressed opinions of administrators and 4-H agents in the state under study regarding the program's ability to accommodate transgender or
nonbinary people.

A subsequent purpose was to determine if administrators in other states had addressed any issues or concerns expressed by administrators in the state under study and if there was data to warrant or appease these concerns. If other states had faced the same issues, I attempted to ascertain ways administrators could positively address or rectify them in the state under study. I compared survey and interview responses to determine if administrators and 4-H agents had similar or opposing views on the program's status in the state under study.

Documented studies, as cited later in this paper, indicated youth identifying as transgender and nonbinary were treated negatively, felt unsafe in various environments such as at school, and were less likely to participate in events out of fear. By contrast, the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development, known as the Tufts Study (Lerner et al., 2013), confirmed several indicators demonstrating a relationship between positive youth development and “high levels of self-regulation (ISR)” and “having a hopeful future” (p. 4). The study also reported that youth involved in the 4-H program were less likely to participate in high-risk behaviors and were more likely to enroll in higher education and contribute more to their communities (p. 5). My desired outcome of this research is to create a gender-neutral, inclusive, and safe environment for all youth.

Rationale

My professional career started in victim services. I have spent more than 30 years helping others find their voice and free themselves from fear, domination, and shame. Victims of violence have been re-victimized by authorities who did not want to believe such acts could occur, that such violation of children could exist in society. In working with a population of people who had been victimized, I discovered that they often share other underlying
characteristics such as homosexuality, mental illness, gender confusion, and previous victimization. Listening to them in a counseling role, I heard too many times that they felt they deserved the violence for having these other “conditions” or made to feel they were less deserving of justice because of them.

I have always been a champion of the underdog. I want every person to be valued for who and what they are, never feeling less or undeserving because of their non-compliance within a society that has created standards-based mostly on religious indoctrination. I strive for the true separation of church and state and appreciate the differences people bring to the team and their contributions to problem-solving and critical thinking. I value what someone can do rather than focus on what society has labeled as their inability. This is why I chose the term differently-abled over the term disabled. However, I use this term with caution as it is not yet entirely accepted. Acceptance is my guiding principle, and I struggle daily to find ways to be more inclusive in various activities. Working for a 4-H program is a fulfilling journey for me because it does not grade, test, or require minimum standards of acceptable work, and vigorously promotes hands-on learn-by-doing. I believe in the mission (citation withheld to protect the confidentiality, 2019):

The … 4-H Youth Development Program uses a learn-by-doing approach to help youth gain the knowledge and skills they need to be responsible, productive citizens. This mission is accomplished by creating safe and inclusive learning environments, involving caring adults, and utilizing the expertise and resources of the University … and the nationwide land grant university system and the policies currently in place. (para. 1)

Gender identity is not a fad; it is an awakening of self-acceptance, and people in higher education and workplace environments must deal with it. In October 2010, The National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force released results from a
study. The study reported that 41% of transgender people in the United States had attempted suicide, and 19% had been denied medical treatment directly due to their gender nonconformity. The participants in the study were adults. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is an organization that self-proclaimed that they had been “championing LGBTQ issues in K-12 education since 1990” (https://www.glsen.org). GLSEN conducted the 2015 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2016), and the 2017 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2018). The researchers reported that 57.6% of transgender youth felt unsafe at school in 2015 and that the number rose to 59.5% in 2017. Both reports showed that transgender youth had significantly lower grade point averages (GPAs); and were less likely to consider a plan for higher education (2016, 2018). These statistics represented critical evidence for the need to make youth development programs inclusive and to create gender-neutral environments of safety and belonging.

Goals

The primary goal of my evaluation was to determine if a need existed for a gender-neutral policy in the state under study. The secondary goals were to:

1. Educate the university administrators, Extension leaders, and state 4-H leaders on the topic of gender neutrality; and

2. Share the research and findings from 2014 to the present regarding the needs of transgender, gender-neutral, nonbinary, and gender-questioning youth.

Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943, 1954) has remained a principle in psychology, child development, and sociology. The needs of safety and belonging sit just above breathing, food, and water. Safety includes freedom from fear of both physical and psychological harm. Belonging encompasses trust, acceptance, and being part of a group. The development of
positive self-esteem and self-actualization stalls if these needs are unmet in a child. One way to encourage a sense of belonging is through acceptance and allowance. When transgender youth are permitted to present themselves in a manner that makes them feel comfortable and reflects who they are, they express feelings of safety, as illustrated in the works of Durwood et al. (2017) and Taub et al. (2016).

I designed part of my research to examine successful policies and programs from other state 4-H programs and public schools. Those would be presented to the Dean of Extension and 4-H Program Leader to begin formulating a 4-H Gender Neutrality Policy in the state under study. As the case in Iowa illustrated, the University administrators must have buy-in, or the entire effort could fail. My research concluded that a policy would benefit youth and improve the program. I supported the policy by creating professional development and training tools for all Extension personnel, primarily County Extension Directors and 4-H agents.

**Definition of Terms**

Generally, the vocabulary used to describe and identify gender is based on a binary system, male and female. It is essential to first distinguish between the often-disordered terms **Sex and Gender**. Sex refers to our biological and physiological traits, specifically those associated with reproduction. Gender relates to society's characteristics and roles based on their sex. According to Dr. Nicki Lisa Cole in her article, *How Gender Differs from Sex*:

...gender is a performance composed of a set of learned behaviors that are associated with and expected to follow sex category. Sex category, how we classify one's biological sex, refers to differences in genitalia used to categorize humans as male, female, or intersex (ambiguous or co-occurring male and female genitalia). Sex is thus biologically determined, whereas gender is socially constructed. (2019, June 22, para. 2)
For the reader to grasp the concept of gender choice more fully, the following definitions will assist in understanding the vocabulary used in this paper:

1. Assigned sex at birth – The sex (male or female) assigned to a child at birth, most often based on the child’s external anatomy (Smith, 2018).

2. Cisgender – gender matches the gender assigned at birth based on physical sex (Smith, 2018).


4. Gender expression – “The way a person communicates their gender to the world through mannerisms, clothing, speech, behavior, etc. Gender expression varies depending on culture, context, and historical period” (Fenway, 2020, p. 5).

5. Gender fluid – Gender identity, which is not fixed, can change periodically (Smith, 2019).

6. Gender identity – “A person’s innate, deeply-felt psychological identification as a man, woman, or something else, which may or may not correspond to the person’s external body or assigned sex at birth” (Fenway, 2010, p. 3).

7. Gender-neutral – “not referring to either sex but only to people in general” (Merriam-Webster, 2021, para. 1).

8. Gender neutrality – “the idea that policies, language, and other social institutions should avoid distinguishing roles according to people's sex or gender” (Wikipedia, 2021, para. 1).
9. LGBTQIA+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (can also represent Ally); the plus is for anyone in the gender or sexually expansive community (Moor, 2019).

10. Nonbinary (genderqueer) – People whose gender identity or gender expression fall outside man and woman's binary categories (Fenway, 2020).

11. Transgender – Umbrella term for those whose gender ID does not match sex assigned at birth (Fenway, 2020).

**Research Questions**

My research questions were:

1) How do 4-H staff and faculty create open, inviting, and inclusive programs that meet the needs of all youth?

2) What is the current administrative policy for handling topics such as bathroom use and lodging at 4-H events?

3) What barriers exist in the development of gender-neutral policies in 4-H for the state under study?

4) What county 4-H program(s) have recently dealt with a transgender or related membership issue?

5) How can the 4-H program more effectively fulfill the mission and vision statements for all youth without discrimination?

**Conclusion**

Studies completed from 2014 - 2019 revealed the increasing numbers of those identifying as transgender, nonbinary, gender fluid, and a few other gender identities (APA, 2015; Budge et al., 2014; Day et al., 2019; Gillard et al., 2014; Gregor et al., 2015; James et al., 2016; Johns et al., 2019; Kahn, 2016; McElligott, 2019; Taub, 2016). The 4-H Youth Development program, funded partly by the federal and state governments, and the administrators thereof, have a responsibility to make all youth feel welcome, safe, and like they belong. While many program
administrations adhered to various policies related to non-discrimination and ADA guidelines, there were no nationally adopted policies on gender neutrality. When I reviewed the program for the state under the study’s program, there were no guidelines for county agents to use when designating housing, bathroom use, counselor assignments, and other decisions influenced by gender identity. The following literature review demonstrated a need for guidance and policies to protect the rights of transgender members and to show that the program is welcoming and open to all.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

People no longer fit into just two categories, male and female. Studies conducted since 2014 revealed that there are increasing numbers of those identifying as transgender, nonbinary, gender fluid, and a few other gender identities (APA, 2015; Budge et al., 2014; Day et al., 2019; Gillard et al., 2014; Gregor et al., 2015; James et al., 2016; Johns et al., 2019; Kahn, 2016; McElligott, 2019; Taub, 2016). In this research, I used the term transgender, which served as a description for all persons identifying as something other than their sex (gender assigned at birth based on anatomical parts). As it relates to youth, the topic is relatively new, but researchers see more evidence of early transitioning and gender-questioning (Johns et al., 2019). University administrators expect 4-H Extension professionals to serve all populations and provide inclusive programming. The primary purpose of this literature review was to demonstrate the level of importance of providing gender-neutral policies in a specific state’s 4-H program.

I began with the evidence linking gender-inclusivity to better mental health and the movement from treatment, as in disorder, to inclusion. My focus was on what research indicated as ways to increase acceptance, support, and resources. I emphasized what schools and communities needed to do according to gender nonconformists. My conclusion was concerned with the need for guidelines and policies to establish authentic inclusion and to give all youth a sense of safety and belonging.

I found most sources for this review in the National Louis University library, the University of Florida library, and ResearchGate. ResearchGate is a 15-million-member professional network for scientists and researchers. A few articles had publication dates before 2015, and most publication dates were from 2015 – 2019. This review was a balance of qualitative and quantitative data from the sources found in my search. Most of the sources were
peer-reviewed and vetted. Transgender youth is an emerging topic and one that still needed research (Singh et al., 2014, p. 208).

**Mental Health**

According to Tebbe and Moradi (2016), mental health issues such as depression, severe anxiety, and suicidal ideation occur significantly higher in those identifying as transgender or nonconformists than the general population. For example, the suicide attempt rate of the general population is 2-9% but is 26-45% among those identifying as transgender (Tebbe & Moradi, 2016, p. 1). As with other minority populations, fear of being bullied, harassed, discriminated against, and unaccepted creates toxic environments for individuals choosing gender express, gender identify, or gender question. Transgender persons also deal with accusations related to perversion, pedophilia, and homosexuality, as people misunderstand what transgender means and mistakenly equate it with sexuality (Acklin, 2017, p. 110; Singh et al., 2014, p. 214). In writing about the battle over bathroom use, Scherer wrote, “the specter of a sexual predator abusing transgender-friendly laws continues to frame the debate” (2016, para. 18).

One issue identified by many subjects in research from 2015 - 2019 was the lack of resources and low population of mental health professionals familiar with the needs of transgender populations (APA, 2015; Johns et al., 2019; Paceley et al., 2017). Mental health professionals saw transgender clients in terms of their “mental illness” and treatments focused on curing them. Initially, professionals labeled the illness as Gender Identity Disorder. In late 2019, the World Health Organization eliminated Gender Identity Disorder from mental illnesses. Gender Dysphoria, now considered a condition of sexual health, was added. The American Psychological Association took the same action (World Health Organization, 2019).

In his dissertation, *Policy Advocacy: Transgender Students in a Public School,*
McElligott (2019) cited multiple sources where he found data indicating that parents and other adults had a hard time dealing with transgender students, but other students did not.

There is also research supporting that adults generally have a harder time with a student undergoing a gender transition than other students (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). Many interviews associated with these cases show the same thing: the students themselves are much more accepting and tolerant of this transitioning student than their middle-aged parents are. (McElligott, 2019, p. 13).

McElligott (and the authors he referenced) repeatedly encountered students who were not bothered by the locker room and bathroom use of students identifying as different than their sex assigned at birth. However, lawsuits, complaints, and challenges had been filed by parents, teachers, and administrators. Gregor et al.’s (2015) work further supported this idea. Gregor et al. studied transgender youth, their cisgender (binary gender assigned at birth) siblings, and the parents. Unexpectedly, the researchers found no difference in the mental health issues of the trans- and cisgender siblings in homes where parents were supportive and accepting. One parent, speaking from their own experiences as a parent of a transgender child, was quoted as saying, “…it’s not the kids, I’ll tell you now – it’s not the kids, the kids are no problem. At the school, the kids are no problem, but if the parents get to hear about things…they can kick off” (p. 243).

Parental and community acceptance and support are critical factors for the mental well-being of transgender youth (APA, 2015; Barr et al., 2016; Budge et al., 2014; Capous-Dsyllas & Barron, 2017). Mental health professionals do not recognize early indicators of gender identity and gender questioning as anything more than temporary playful behavior (Capous-Dsyllas & Barron, 2017, p. 5). Therefore, parents are not getting the needed insight or helpful directions.
A positive, supportive, and caring environment is essential to the actualization and transition process when offered early and throughout the child’s development. Yet, professionals often tell parents their children are going through phases, they will grow out of it, and dress-up behavior is an example of creative play (Capous-Dsyllas & Barron, 2017, p. 5; Gregor et al., 2015, pp. 3-4).

Three studies, one each from the years 2012, 2015, and 2017, indicated that the transgender population, as well as others identifying as homosexual, gender questioning, and queer (LGBTQ+), have not found the help they needed from mental health professionals (Mikalson et al., 2012; APA, 2015; Puszczyk & Czajeczny, 2017). Mikalson indicated a large percentage of those seeking help found that professionals did not know how to help them with their gender identity issues. Additionally, their gender identity issues became the focus of therapy, even though those were not the expressed reason for wanting help. One participant said, "Therapists need to recognize that gender identity is not always the problem. It makes it harder to access services when you don’t know if you are going to have to discuss gender identity issues—something the therapist thinks is more interesting and exotic" (Mikalson et al., 2012, p. 161).

The American Psychological Association (APA) released a report from research done to determine the need for guidelines for mental health professionals in working with transgender nonconformists (TGNC). “In community surveys, TGNC people have reported that many mental health care providers lack basic knowledge and skills relevant to care of TGNC people” (APA, 2015, p. 837). More specifically, findings showed that less than 30% of mental health treatment providers were significantly familiar with TGNC issues and they were most likely doing more harm than good (p. 832). This work concluded with 12 mental health practice guidelines for the effective treatment of transgender persons (pp. 834-851). “The purpose of the Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People
Guidelines is to assist psychologists in the provision of culturally competent, developmentally appropriate, and trans-affirmative psychological practice with TGNC people” (p. 1).

Puszczyk and Czajeczny (2017) published their findings on diagnostic and therapeutic controversies related to the treatment of children, specifically pre-pubescent aged children. The authors noted that the APA designed some of the previous work to create published guidelines for working with transgender adolescents and adults. However, in dealing with younger children, they reported a tendency to use interventions focused on correction and normalization. The basis of this practice was a belief that “therapeutic work in childhood can eventually eliminate dysphoric symptoms and help the child feel comfortable with his or her biological sex” (p. 5). The authors noted progress after five years, but the mental health profession still considered transgender expression as not normal and looked for ways to correct it in children. This type of treatment was counterproductive to the child's mental health and contributed to less understanding and more fear.

The mental health needs of a transgender person are affected by the community in which they live. For example, Paceley et al. (2017) published their research findings on transgender youth in small towns. “All of the interview participants expressed the need for safe and supportive spaces in which they could be themselves. Specifically, participants identified the need for more transgender friends and resources” (p. 12). The transgender community is still looking for resources, acceptance, and safe spaces to be themselves and for a sense of belonging.

The Journal of Adolescent Health published the research findings of Russell et al. (2018) regarding the mental well-being of transgender adolescents as it related to the use of their chosen name (pp. 503-505). The authors acknowledged the number of youths surveyed was low (<70).
However, they noted that it was one of the largest studies of transgender youth to date relating mental health to risk factors such as chosen name (p. 505).

The data was based on responses from self-identified transgender youth who indicated that they had a preferred name different from the name given to them at birth. Researchers then asked the youth if they could use that name in four different environments: home, school, work, and with friends. The results indicated a correlation between the ability to use their chosen name and a significant decrease in depressive symptoms (5.37-unit decrease), suicidal ideations (29% decrease), and suicidal behavior (56% decrease) (Russell et al., 2018). The authors concluded their article by saying:

Transgender youth who were able to use their chosen names in multiple contexts reported fewer depressive symptoms and less suicidal ideation and behavior…use of their chosen name in multiple contexts appears to affirm their gender identity and lower mental health risks known to be high in this group. (p. 505)

In their blog pertaining to pronouns and health equity, the Health Care Coalition of Southern Oregon wrote, “Identity contributes to a person’s self-esteem and personal sense of worth” (2021, March 22, para. 3). A person’s name is a significant piece of their identity. Having one’s name mispronounced or ignored is detrimental to one’s feeling of acceptance and belonging.

**Sense of Belonging**

Abraham Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs* (1943, 1954) has remained a principle in psychology, child development, and sociology. The needs of safety and belonging sit just above the needs of breathing, food, and water. Safety includes freedom from fear of both physical and psychological harm. Belonging encompasses trust, acceptance, and being part of a group. The
development of positive self-esteem and self-actualization stalls if these needs are unmet in a child.

In *The Psychology Dictionary*, Sam N (2013) defined belonging as "a feeling of being taken in and accepted as part of a group, thus, fostering a sense of belonging. It also relates to being approved of and accepted by society in general" (para. 1). Having the sense or feeling of belonging is critical to believing life has value. It is essential when dealing with painful emotions. When one does not have a sense of belonging, they feel physical pain. “A sense of belonging to a greater community improves your motivation, health, and happiness” (Hall, 2014, para. 4). A sense of belonging to a community is positively related to well-being and is a crucial factor in the mental health of transgender people. Multiple studies have documented the positive impact of supportive environments and feelings of acceptance (Barr et al., 2016; Budge et al., 2014; Taub et al., 2016). In some research, the sense of social support correlated with lower levels of both anxiety and depression (Barr et al., 2016; Budge et al., 2014; Kahn, 2016; Taub et al., 2016).

One way to encourage a sense of belonging is through acceptance and allowance. When transgender youth are permitted to present themselves in a manner that makes them feel comfortable and reflects who they are, they express feelings of safety. The works of Durwood et al. (2017) and Taub et al. (2016) illustrated this.

Durwood et al. (2017) conducted the first research on socially transitioned youth from the youths’ perspective. “A social transition involves a child presenting to other people as a member of the opposite gender in all contexts (e.g., wearing clothes and using pronouns of that gender)” (p. 4). Social transitioning is nonmedical, and the number of parents allowing social transitioning has been increasing (p. 5). The authors reported no research documenting the transitioned child's
self-reported feelings of self-worth at the time of this study. Regarding depressive and anxiety symptoms, the findings of Durwood et al. (2017) demonstrated no statistically significant differences between the socially transitioned child and the national averages (p. 10). Additionally, “Children in all groups reported self-worth that was higher than the midpoint…of the scale, indicating high self-worth overall” (p. 10).

Taub et al. (2016) collected data related to gender-neutral housing options on college and university campuses. The practice of assigning rooms based on biological sex can create difficulties for a transgender student. It is “potentially creating an uncomfortable living environment for ideal student growth and development” (p. 15). Gender-neutral housing has the potential to offer a greater sense of safety and inclusion for transgender, gender non-conforming, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual students; as a result, it is important to provide greater flexibility in housing assignments, and to allow opportunities for broader educational experiences for many students (p. 16). The findings indicated that an increasing number of institutions offered gender-neutral housing, but this remained under 50% of all housing options (p. 13).

From Maslow (1954) to Taub (2016), research has indicated that children's positive physical and psychological development depends on meeting their needs for safety and belonging. A sense of belonging is fostered by acceptance and creating environments where they are permitted and encouraged to express themselves without judgment. Restrictive rules and actions such as separation by biological sex and sex-based dress codes can hamper this development and contribute to mental and emotional distress. A significant source of contention is the question of bathroom use, especially in schools (Scherer, 2016).

Schools

In 2016, under President Barack Obama, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and
the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a joint paper referred to as the Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students. While the letter itself was not policy, the two departments collaborated to provide significant guidance and interpretation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX). The letter read, “This letter summarizes a school’s Title IX obligations regarding transgender students and explains how the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) evaluate a school’s compliance with these obligations” (U.S. DOE, 2016, p. 1). The departments informed school leaders that discrimination based on gender identity was prohibited and could result in their loss of federal funding.

In February 2017, President Donald Trump issued a new Dear Colleague Letter rescinding the guidance and leaving interpretation of Title IX to individual school administrators (Battle & Wheeler II, 2017). In their article for the Washington Post, Sandhya et al. (2017) reported several sources representing the Trump administration, the DOE, and the DOJ, who stated that the action taken was due to a lack of legal analysis (p. 1). The letter included the statement that “schools must ensure that all students, including LGBT students, are able to learn and thrive in a safe environment” (Battle & Wheeler II, 2017, p. 3). The interpretation of whether sex discrimination included gender discrimination and if students had the right to use facilities consistent with their chosen gender would again be up to state school officials and individual school administrators (Sandhya et al., 2017).

Also, in 2017, Ellen Kahn, head of the Children, Youth, and Families Program at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), reported a significant increase in the number of calls her office received from educators wanting to know how to create an inclusive environment (Kahn, 2017). She attributed the rise to the political attention on transgender rights and the pending legal cases
associated with student rights related to bathroom and locker room use (p. 70). Transgender youth continued to struggle for acceptance and “to experience high rates of harassment, bullying, and other types of in-school victimization, including verbal or physical assault by peers and humiliation by educators refusing to use the correct pronouns” (p. 70). Kahn stated that the students could not wait for courts and politics to make decisions.

The data collected in the biennial National School Climate Survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) supported Kahn's assessment. According to their website, GLSEN.org, “GLSEN works to ensure that LGBTQ students can learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment” (GLSEN, 2020, para. 2). Networking nationally with educators and students, GLSEN researchers have identified “four major ways that schools can cultivate a safe and supportive environment for all of their students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression” (GLSEN, 2020, p. 1). One of these ways is through comprehensive policies.

In summarizing the data collected with this national survey of students identifying as LGBTQ, the researchers found:

- 87.4% heard negative remarks about transgender people; 45.6% heard them frequently or often;
- 42.7% avoid bathrooms as unsafe or are uncomfortable in gender-segregating areas;
- 40.6% avoid locker rooms for the same reason as bathrooms;
- 75.4% avoid school functions because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable;
- 70.5% avoid extracurricular activities for the same reasons; and
- 18% (1/5th of the LGBTQ population) had to change schools because they felt unsafe (Kosciw et al., 2018. P. xviii).

The conclusions drawn in this report indicated that schools remain unsafe and are not conducive
to learning and developing for all children. The following excerpt, published in 2018, demonstrated the need for clear, concise, and specific written policies to protect students:

The 2017 National School Climate Survey, as in our previous surveys, shows that schools are often unsafe learning environments for LGBTQ students. Hearing biased or derogatory language at school, especially sexist remarks, homophobic remarks, and negative remarks about gender expression, was a common occurrence. However, teachers and other school authorities do not often intervene when others make anti-LGBTQ statements in their presence, and students' use of such language remained mostly unchallenged. Almost 8 in 10 students in our survey reported feeling unsafe at school because of at least one personal characteristic, with sexual orientation and gender expression being the most commonly reported characteristics [emphasis added]. Students also frequently reported avoiding spaces in their schools that they perceived as being unsafe, especially bathrooms, locker rooms, and P.E. classes (Kosciw et al., 2018, p. 132).

From 2014 to 2019, researchers reported that parents can be a prominent barrier for transgender rights. Research and interviews revealed that parents are directly associated with school administrators’ decisions to drop, change, or ignore policies giving transgender students the right to use bathrooms and locker rooms based on their gender identity (Gillard et al., 2014; Gregor et al., 2015; Elischberger et al., 2016; James et al., 2016; Scherer, 2016; Acklin, 2017; Day et al., 2019). Research by Acklin (2017) dealt specifically with yet another issue, athletic teams. Without federal laws or policies, decisions made at the school, district, and state levels differed dramatically (p. 107). According to Acklin (2017), in athletics, the opposite of safety and belonging are created when transgender athletes are “significantly restricted or completely
excluded from playing on the teams with which they identify” (p. 111). Contributing to the issue were rulings of inclusion at one level and then exclusion from a higher level.

In reviewing the Obama and Trump letters and the rescinding of guidelines, there were those who stated that Title IX legislation still prohibits discrimination based on gender. Therefore, guidelines are not required (Kahn, 2016; Sandhya et al., 2017). Title IX governs all federally funded educational institutions, including all land-grant universities and their 4-H programs. The state's land-grant university under study required faculty members to include the phrase *An Equal Opportunity Institution* in all publications. The university itself had strict policies and governing documents regarding the rights of students. However, agents were not guided because the 4-H program is a non-formal educational youth development program serving minors.

**4-H Programs**

In 2017, the National 4-H Council produced its *Strategic Plan: 4-H Youth Development: A 2025 Vision* (N.A., 2017). This report included their national 4-H mission statement, “4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnership with caring adults. The mission of 4-H is to provide meaningful opportunities for all youth and adults to work together to create sustainable community change” (N.A., 2017). Nationally, 4-H focuses on four Essential Elements, one of which is Belonging. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development, copied from Hensley et al. (2007) and Irvine (2018)
Teaching essential elements to volunteers and other agents include introducing them to the issue of religious neutrality. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is home to the National 4-H headquarters and the 4-H Youth Development Program, which prohibits discrimination based on multiple factors, including religion. As a result of this, “If 4-H activities and programs included prescribed religious prayers, scriptures, or religious components to club bylaws, activities, or names, it would inject impermissible sectarian overtones. In addition, such violations could create the impression that 4-H is not open to participation by all” (USDA, n.d.). The purpose of such rules is to avoid any actions that may make someone feel excluded or unwelcome. This comes under the quadrant of Belonging but also relates to Independence and Mastery.

USDA also prohibited 4-H contests from being held according to sex segregation or to ban someone from participating in any event based on sex under the provisions of Title IX. However, these rules only referenced separating males and females for competition and prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation. There was no reference to gender identity. In addition, there were no references to the issue of gender identity which existed on any 4-H
website for the state under study. Without rules or guidelines referencing gender identity or addressing nonbinary topics, the question became, is 4-H genuinely able to be inclusive and create the Sense of Belonging for everyone?

President Trump rescinded the Dear Colleague Letter, which created the same situation for school administrators that 4-H agents face. Without guidance and direction from the 4-H administration, each of the multiple counties in the state under study had to create rules and regulations surrounding this topic. The specific problem areas in the public school system were bathrooms and locker rooms. In 4-H, the problems included lodging and bathroom use, specifically related to residential camping and overnight programs on college campuses.

There are 4-H camps in almost every state. Several states have three or more. 4-H designed each of these camps to house one binary gender per cabin. Some still used designated bath houses which were also gender-specific. Generally, most states offered five-day residential camps each summer and were open to youth ages eight to 17. For the 4-H agent, an initial task was to review registrations and assign youth to cabins by gender and age.

In some cases, 4-H programs designated registration spots for male and female members, and registrations were expressly limited to those numbers. Additional programs for older youth (13-18) occurred on college campuses; lodging was in dormitories. Again, youth were housed by gender, and many teens shared bathrooms. If an agent chose to accommodate children based on self-expressed gender identity, it was unclear who the agent was permitted or expected to inform (parents, chaperones, cisgender roommate). The original Dear Colleague letter from the Obama era specified the student's privacy and protection rights and expressly forbade the sharing of the transgender status (U.S. DOE, 2016).

The American Psychological Association (APA) (2015) recommended creating inclusive
forms, with gender questions not restricted to two choices for answers. In addition to gathering more accurate information, this also indicates a supportive and inclusive organization (APA, 2015). In the publication, *I Am My Own Gender*, Singh et al. wrote that their research participants “described the importance of being able to self-define and theorize” (2014, p. 211). Tate et al. (2013) concluded that more accurate and complete information was gathered on a person if enrollment gender questions had multiple options and were broken into various parts (i.e., what sex were you assigned at birth, and what gender do you identify with currently). Collecting more information allows organizers to understand their participants more completely.

The 4-H program’s online enrollment system, 4HOnline, is used by multiple state programs. The directions explicitly stated that parents or guardians are to create the profiles and that youth should not be given passwords or access: “Parents and Guardians are responsible for creating and maintaining Family and Member Profiles. Youth should not be given passwords to access 4HOnline Profiles” (citation withheld for confidentiality). The system also had a binary coded option for the question titled gender. Therefore, a parent or guardian could only identify the child as male or female. This procedure is restrictive, prohibits self-disclosure, and does not indicate an open and welcome environment.

**Need for Written Policies**

In the American Psychological Association’s 2015 document, *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People* (p. 838), data supported the need for written policies regarding the rights of transgender and gender-nonconforming people (TGNC):

TGNC people are at risk of experiencing transgender prejudice and discrimination in educational settings. In a national representative sample of 7,898 LGBT youth in K-12
settings, 55.2% of participants reported verbal harassment, 22.7% reported physical harassment, and 11.4% reported physical assault based on their gender expression (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). In a national community survey of TGNC adults, 15% reported prematurely leaving educational settings ranging from kindergarten through college because of harassment (Grant et al., 2011). Many schools do not include gender identity and gender expression in their school nondiscrimination policies; this leaves TGNC youth without needed protections from bullying and aggression in schools (Singh & Jackson, 2012). TGNC youth in rural settings may be even more vulnerable to intimidation and hostility in their school environment due to prejudice (Kosciw et al., 2014). (American Psychological Association, 2015, p. 838)

Several school administrations were involved in legal situations related to bathrooms by transgender individuals. The cases primarily centered around the lack of, or administrators’ opposition to, policies allowing transgender youth to use the facilities labeled for their gender identity. Consequently, the courts were beginning to hand down decisions, and the school districts were losing those discrimination cases (Mataconis, 2019).

The legal case of Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board began in 2015 and concluded in 2019. It took four years for the case to work through the system, but the courts ruled in favor of a transgender student who claimed his rights were violated (Polantz & Kelly, 2019; Mataconis, 2019; Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board, 2019). According to the Factual Background section of the court documents, the Gloucester High School administration initially granted Grimm, a transgender male, permission to use the male restroom. According to the official court documents, the school administrators then began “receiving complaints from adult members of the community who had learned that a transgender boy was using male
restrooms at the high school" (Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board, 2019, p. 4). Community members made demands to prohibit transgender children from choosing a bathroom, and opposition by parents instigated a rescinding of Grimm’s permission to use the male restroom. The school board adopted a policy on December 9, 2014. It read, in part, “It shall be the practice of the GCPS to provide male and female restroom and locker room facilities in its schools, and the use of said facilities shall be limited to the corresponding biological genders, and students with gender identity issues shall be provided an alternative appropriate private facility” (p. 4). As it was now policy, administrators informed Grimm use of the male restroom would result in disciplinary action against him (p. 5).

The court did recognize the school board’s attempt to resolve the problem with the eventual construction of single-use restrooms. However, several instances detailed in the case demonstrated the hardships for the student brought on by the policy: 1) Grimm did not have access to a bathroom during after-hours activities which caused him great distress; 2) the stadium area had no single-use facilities making it difficult for Grimm to attend events there; 3) when constructed, the single-user bathrooms were not in all areas and were not easily accessed in a timely manner for a student during the school day (p. 5). The policy created a stressful and difficult situation for Grimm and all transgender students in the district. In the conclusion of the brief, the judge wrote that the policy resulted in suicidal thoughts by Grimm (p. 27). The court awarded Grimm $1.00 but ruled the school administration violated his rights under the 14th amendment and Title IX.

The ruling came two years after Grimm graduated. In their article, Polantz and Kelly (2019) quoted Grimm as saying, “The bottom line is I'm a boy like anybody else.” He added, "I'm not a freak – my very existence is not a perversion. I am just a person who is trying to live
his life like anybody else, and that I have to think about my bathroom usage is unacceptable" (para. 10). The Supreme Court of the United States rejected the request to hear the case, ultimately supporting the lower court’s ruling.

In June of 2021, the case of Grimm v. Gloucester School Board was back in the news. The school board appealed the ruling in 2020, but the U.S. Supreme Court chose not to hear the appeal of the original ruling, letting stand the decision in favor of Grimm (Hurley, 2021). While the ruling did not set a precedent, it stood in support of a student’s right to use the bathroom aligned to their gender identity.

Other federal, district and appeals courts upheld similar rulings, demonstrating the need for schools and youth organization administrations to consider current, or lack of current, policies. Mataconis (2019) cited eight cases resolved from 2017 to 2019, upheld under appeal, in which rulings favored transgender youth. In Indiana, a federal court judge ruled that a transgender student could use the bathroom of his gender identity. The Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia upheld a school policy to allow bathroom use by gender identity. In Illinois, a district court judge ruled against parents trying to overturn the school’s permission for transgender students to use the bathroom of their choice. Finally, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Wisconsin ruled favorably for a student who sued for being barred from using the bathroom of their gender identity (2019, n.p.).

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defined their discrimination policy on their website (USDA.gov) on their poster, And Justice for All. This policy read in part, “The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression)” (USDA, 2015 December; USDA.gov, 2020). As a program receiving funds
from the USDA, 4-H falls under this department, and the authority for all 4-H programs is
delegated to the National 4-H Headquarters (USDA, 2018, March).

In March of 2018, National 4-H Headquarters and the National 4-H Program Leaders
Working Group published the document, *4-H Guidance for Inclusion of Individuals of All
Gender Identities, Gender Expressions, Sexual Orientations, and Sexes* (USDA, 2018, March).
The authors credited Western Region Program Leaders Work Group for creating the original
publication. A year earlier, in 2017, the University of California (UC) released the report, *4-H
Practices for Inclusion of Individuals of All Gender Identities, Gender Expressions, Sexual
publications had clear statements referencing 4-H camps and other overnight events where
gender segregation occurs (USDA, 2018; University of California, 2017). While the USDA
document was very similar, the UC publication read, “individuals who identify as transgender or
intersex must be allowed to sleep, use the restroom, shower and participate in alignment with
their gender identity” (p. 4).

The conflict for state programs was that these documents were listed as “Guidelines” and
“Practices.” There was no specific written policy. There were some indications that these written
documents may not relate to the actual USDA rules of discrimination and that the addition of
gender identity and gender expression to the classes protected are false (Haverluck, 2018;
Liberty Counsel, 2019, p. 1). The Ohio State 4-H program and Ohio State University came under
fire from the Liberty Counsel for promoting an LGBTQ agenda and adopting the practices
outlined in the previous documents (Liberty Counsel, 2019). Officials fired the Iowa State 4-H
Program Leader in August 2018 for adopting gender neutrality guidelines. While Haveluck’s
article utilized multiple new sources, they could not access any formal documents (2018). Some
of the statements attributed to the board members indicated that the director had no right to create policy, that the use of pronouns should correspond to biological gender, and that the housing of youth would and should be done based on biology only, not identity (Haverluck, 2018). There was no consistency, and as a result, agents of each county within each state made daily decisions.

**Conclusion**

The issue of gender identity, especially as it pertains to minors, is a relatively new area of research and a current political and legal topic of debate. The number of youths identifying as other than their sex assigned at birth is increasing, and this review provides evidence of the difficulties these students experience. Whether or not Title IX laws cover gender identity is still being argued, but national studies document many incidents of harassment, bullying, and abuse occurring against transgender students. These youth report feeling unsafe and uncomfortable, and as a result, they avoid gender-segregated areas such as bathrooms and locker rooms. This avoidance impacts their ability to participate in educational and developmental activities.

Also well documented are the mental health issues of gender identity, gender questioning, and nonbinary identities. Depression, anxiety, and suicidality are prevalent in these populations, more so when the community or climate is not supportive. Resources, including medical and mental health services, are lacking in rural and urban neighborhoods. The mental health profession is still behind in understanding the needs of those identifying as other than their sex assigned at birth. Some make gender the focus of sessions when other topics were the reason for seeking help.

While mental wellness is critical to healthy development, having a sense of safety and belonging is also necessary. As a child, being permitted to express and identify yourself helps
develop a sense of belonging that leads to mastery and independence. It also contributes to positive self-worth and feelings of inclusion. An organization can demonstrate openness by offering more than the binary choices for gender on enrollment forms. The organization must adapt to the use of generic pronouns or those consistent with a person's request and develop programs that do not gender segregate.

While schools are undergoing changes and there is evidence of more non-discriminatory policies or procedures, especially regarding bathroom use, many 4-H programs has created no such steps. Many programs continue to house youth by sex in separate locations and require them to use the bathrooms or bathhouses corresponding to that label. Their enrollment system requires parents to withhold passwords so children cannot enter any personal data, and there are only two gender choices. As the transgender population grows, 4-H agents face housing issues at overnight events. Youth are beginning to self-disclose at events, requesting that adults in charge call them by a different name and use pronouns other than those listed on their enrollment forms. As a result, 4-H administrators can face legal difficulties if they hide from the issue. More importantly, they are not creating an open and inclusive environment. In the next chapter, I described my mixed methodology approach to gather data and the utilization-based approach used to evaluate my results.
Chapter Three: Methodology

In this research, I employed the utilization-focused program evaluation method. According to Patton (2008), this method of evaluation is “done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses” (p. 39). This work focused on the agents and administrators in 4-H program in the state under study as they met the needs of youth identifying as other than their gender assigned at birth.

Research Design Overview

I conducted surveys with 4-H youth development faculty agents in the state under study. The primary purpose of this survey was to determine whether agents working directly with youth in each county had encountered issues related to serving youth identifying as other than their gender assigned at birth. In addition, the survey allowed the faculty to share information related to specific issues, how the faculty handled those issues, and if the administrators provided guidance or answers to the agents. As there were no specific written policies or procedures in this state’s program related to this topic, I designed this research to solicit input from county-based faculty about whether such policies or procedures would benefit their program and the youth they serve.

I used this method to answer the need for a gender-neutrality policy by determining whether the county agents faced questions to which there were no written, state-wide, consistent answers. I also collected data related to the number of county agents who encountered the topics of transgender or non-binary identities, and the number of county programs in which the topics of transgender or non-binary identities have existed. There were nearly 70 individual county programs in the state under study, and no state-wide policies or protocols. These surveys also allowed me to collect data related to how county agents and county administrators had handled
various issues and to determine whether there were major differences between counties.

Another portion of this research included conducting semi-structured interviews with state-level universities and 4-H administrators in the state under study and in additional states. I designed interview questions for the state under study to determine if administrators had addressed issues related to gender neutrality and whether there were plans to create policies related to these issues. For interviews in other states, I designed questions to determine whether they have attempted to initiate gender neutrality policies and, if so, whether the program was affected by such attempts and the outcomes.

Participants

In this program evaluation, there were three stakeholder groups. The first two groups included administrators from land-grant university Extension programs in the state under study, and four additional state 4-H programs. These individuals held positions responsible for developing, implementing, and enforcing policies for youth development programming. 4-H agents in the state under study made up the third group. Agents were the ones working directly with youth in their county programs. Their responsibilities included recruiting and maintaining memberships and handling member needs, event registrations, and participation questions. They also recruited, trained, and supervised adult volunteers working directly with youth. All participants were 18–65 years of age, and no youth members were involved.

Data Gathering Techniques

I designed the semi-structured interviews of administrators to gather qualitative data related to: (1) state-level administrator experiences with gender-based issues and (2) state-level policies related to gender neutrality. I designed the survey questions for 4-H agents to gather quantitative data related to gender-based issues occurring in individual county 4-H programs,
and to determine whether the county or state administrators were involved, and how they handled the issue. Additionally, I designed qualitative questions to elicit agent input on the need (or lack thereof) for a gender neutrality policy within their county and state program.

**Surveys**

I designed an agent survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data (see Appendix A). The quantitative data questions regarded county agent experiences related to gender identities within the 4-H program of the state under study. Example question topics included: (a) transgender member enrollment frequency, and (b) housing and overnight accommodations for youth identifying as transgender or nonbinary. Qualitative questions were related to handling such experiences or questions and their opinions on the need for gender neutrality state-wide policies. I asked agents to share their email addresses in the survey if they were willing to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview (see Appendix B). Answers to these questions allowed me to gather more specific data on the issues encountered and how they were handled or resolved in their county.

**Interviews**

I conducted interviews with members of three stakeholder groups, allowing me to collect different types of data from various populations. My goal was to gather qualitative data from the results of semi-structured interviews with 4-H state administrators in the state under study (see Appendix C). I had three purposes for conducting these interviews. The first was to determine if any programs were being considered on a state level to address the subject of transgender youth. The second purpose was to establish whether a significant difference existed between what was happening in the county programs and what state administrators believed was happening. Finally, the questions would define the difference between the needs identified by the county
agents and the state administrators.

I designed a second semi-structured interview to collect additional qualitative data from 4-H state administrators in other states which have documented attempts at instituting policies or general protocols related to gender neutrality (see Appendix D). I divided the semi-structured interview questions into three sections, including questions covering the time: 1) before the creation of the policy, 2) during the investigative phase, and 3) after the adoption of the policy. Question topics were related to barriers, gains, and losses. I identified states using the information provided by the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals (NAE4-HYDP).

The third group consisted of 4-H agents in the state under study who had already answered survey questions and agreed to be interviewed (see Appendix B). I designed these questions to go beyond the survey questions. The questions aided me in understanding how the agents felt towards a gender neutrality policy, any experiences related to transgender or nonbinary youth, and how the agents interpreted administrator actions as they related to issues of gender identity.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

Quantitative survey questions had answer choices on a Likert-type scale. I analyzed that data using Qualtrics software to determine the frequency of specific occurrences related to gender identity. I analyzed interview data using coding and determined whether there were specific themes, similar experiences, and unique experiences among the members of a particular group.

In addition, I made qualitative analysis comparisons using survey and interview answers from county agents and administrators. The purpose was to determine how the multiple
participant groups described what was happening in the program. I utilized a descriptive focus, e.g., “What happens in the program?” (Patton, 2008, p. 301). Using a further breakdown by districts, I used a diversity focus for evaluation. “This evaluation gives voice to different perspectives on and illuminates various experiences with the program” (Patton, 2008, p. 301).

**Ethical Considerations**

I obtained permission from the state-level administrators of the 4-H program before I invited county 4-H agents to participate. I requested participation by email and collected an informed consent form before sending the anonymous Qualtrics survey. All survey data was compiled into a single set of data and analyzed, thus maintaining the anonymity of all participants.

Participants were permitted to end the interview at any time and provided opportunities for breaks if the conversation became complicated or overwhelming. This subject is still controversial, especially when referencing children. While conducting this work, I made all efforts to abstain from any personal conversations, debates, or discussions with potential participants regarding the topic to avoid persuading or creating any bias for the participant.

**Limitations**

Due to the nature of the study and the mental, physical, and emotional reactions some people have to the topic, I did not ask youth to participate in this study. However, they were significant to the purpose of collecting the data. I relied on 4-H agents identifying, reaching out to, and securing interviews with adult alumni identifying as other than cisgender or parents of youth identifying as the same. I expected the number of interviews to be extremely low. However, agents did not identify any adult alumni, so there was no data to help me understand their perspectives in my study.
Over the past few years, the state under study had experienced the loss of 4-H agents and was under a hiring freeze for over one year while I conducted this research. Several county 4-H agents in this state were new to the position and may have had limited experiences to draw upon when answering the survey questions. The number of agents who attended some of the events referenced in the survey may be less than 50, and those who had experiences related to gender neutrality may have produced the small sample size.

**Conclusion**

I surveyed and interviewed various participant groups for this research. I analyzed the data using a utilization-focused evaluation method as defined by Michael Q. Patton in his book by the same name (Patton, 2008, p. 39). In addition to quantitative data collected on a Likert-type scale, I collected and evaluated qualitative data using coding, diversity, and descriptive focus. I found the results of this research informative and supportive of the need for a written statewide policy. I outline the results in the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Results

I conducted this research to determine if there was a need for a 4-H gender neutrality policy and related guidelines for the 4-H program in the state under study. In addition, I was determining if administrators and agents interpreted the current non-discrimination statements, policies, and laws to include gender identity. Finally, I also determined if a difference existed between the expressed opinions of administrators and 4-H agents in the state under study regarding the program's ability to accommodate transgender or nonbinary people.

A subsequent purpose was to determine whether administrators in other states had addressed any issues or concerns expressed by administrators in the state under study and if there were data to warrant or appease these concerns. If other states faced the same issues, I attempted to ascertain ways that administrators could positively address or rectify them in the state under study. I also made a comparison to determine if administrators and 4-H agents had similar or opposing views on the program's status in the state under study.

Findings

I used surveys and interviews to collect my research data. I sent an invitation to participate in the 4-H agent survey via an agent listserve to all county offices. Twelve agents submitted consent forms and I sent them links to the survey. All twelve agents completed the surveys. Of those completing the surveys, eight agents agreed to interviews, and five submitted the additional consent for the interview. I interviewed four agents via a virtual platform. I invited two administrators in the state under study to participate; both signed consent and agreed to participate in the interview process. I sent invitations to seven administrators from other states’ 4-H programs requesting interviews. Of the seven administrators receiving an invitation, four signed a consent form. I interviewed each of them individually using a virtual platform.
Survey Data

In the first section of the survey, agents used a Likert-type scale to respond to statements about the 4-H program in their county. In Statement 1, “The 4-H program in my county has enrolled members who identified as transgender,” seven of the 12 county agents agreed or strongly agreed. In statement 2, agents responded to: “The 4-H program in my county has discouraged enrollment of youth who identified as transgender.” One agent responded agree, and eleven responded disagree.

For Statement 3: “The 4-H program in my county has not been able to accommodate the needs of transgender members,” three agents replied agree or strongly agree. When the agent responded agree or strongly agree, an open-ended follow-up question was triggered, requesting the agent explain what accommodations were needed or requested and why the agent could not meet the member's needs. Two agents identified camp facilities as a barrier because of shared bathrooms and gender-cabin designations. One agent stated that there was a lack of a policy to follow for a youth who identified as transgender but was not supported by their family. This was a barrier to accommodating their needs. Another agent wrote, “Not enough education and support for me to handle appropriately.” Another response was that barriers existed, and the final response read, "Policies and space in (redacted) 4-H not set up to provide the best experience for transgender (youth)."

While Statement 3 was related to accommodating the needs of transgender members, Statement 4 was related to denying accommodations. Agents responded to the statement: “In our county camping and overnight event program, we have discouraged or denied transgender youth from participating in overnight programs.” Though agents responded that they had not been able to accommodate the needs of transgender members, in response to statement four, no agent
agreed or strongly agreed they denied accommodations for transgender youth.

Statement 5 was: “The 4-H program in my county has adapted enrollment forms to include more than two traditional gender choices.” Of the 12 agents who participated, two answered agree or strongly agree. Ten agents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their county had adapted enrollment forms.

Statements 6 through 10 pertained to camping and overnight event programming. Statement 6 was: “In our county camping and overnight event program, we have had transgender counselors at camp.” Three agents answered that they agreed or strongly agreed. In response to Statement 7: “In our county camping and overnight event program, we have had transgender campers at camp,” two agents agreed or strongly agreed they had transgender campers. For Statement 8: “In our county camping and overnight event program, we have had transgender campers go to an overnight event,” two agents agreed they had a transgender youth stay at an overnight event. For Statement 9: “In our county camping and overnight event program we have had transgender teenagers participate in residential summer programs,” three agents agreed they had a transgender teenager participate in a residential camping program. In response to Statement 10: “In our county camping and overnight event program we have discouraged or denied transgender youth from participating in overnight programs,” all agents disagreed.

I required a yes or no answer to Question 13: “In your opinion, is the (state under study) program prepared to meet the needs and requested accommodations for transgender youth in your county programs? Why or why not?” I allowed participants to share ideas and opinions in an unrestricted format. One participant did not provide an answer. Ten agents responded no; one agent response was unsure. The follow-up question was “Why or why not?” The following chart (Figure 2) summarizes the responses written:
Participant Responses to the Follow-up to Question 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent Responses</th>
<th>Number of agents with a similar response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reactive, not proactive; case by case</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No guidance/training</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not have accommodations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No policy to follow</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No state support/Unwelcoming culture</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money/Stakeholders; fear of loss</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No gender-neutral language now</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One agent explained, "I can make accommodations, but I don't have the support from (redacted) 4-H to handle those that question my accommodations." Another wrote, “I have requested information on how to address this issue since 2018 and have never been given guidance. The answer is always, ‘we are working on it.’”

Another agent wrote:

As a program, we are not prepared in some ways, such as the physical setup for overnight camps and the way that programming for belonging is set. For example, the camps are arranged to accommodate male campers and female campers, and an important part of the residential experience is the camaraderie between campers and counselors. Youth with a non-binary and/or transgender identification that doesn't fit squarely in these two categories are more challenging to both house and include in the experiences that come with the housing experience. I think we need to meet the needs of these youth, keeping them safe and instituting all aspects of belonging while protecting the safety of youth.
(and the parents and guardians) who are unfamiliar with how a "boy" can sleep in the "girls"[sic] cabin, and vice-versa, or youth that fit into any of the more than five identities. It's a huge paradigm shaking and it's unclear what kinds of accommodations are appropriate, necessary, and don't impose social, moral, or mental challenges on participants.

Another agent wrote, “I have always been told that they have a plan. Yet, I have never seen that plan, nor have I ever been sent that plan.”

I asked participants in Question 14, “Would you be willing to be interviewed by the researcher to discuss transgender youth and the 4-H program in your county?” Of the 12 participants, eight responded yes. I collected their contact information in Question 14A.

In Question 15, I asked, “Is there anything else you would like to add, or something you feel would be important to the topic that I have not asked?” There were six responses. One person wrote, “I don't feel like there is a welcoming culture in my 4-H program, which is why we have not had anyone identify with me as the agent that they are trans.” Another wrote:

We have at least one transgender kid that we know about. Most of the kids in their club know and have no issue. At least one parent has approached me about it and asked for info on how that would be handled at camp. I requested the same information from the state 4-H camping director. We are working on it was the answer.

One participant summed up their survey by writing, “These conversations are only happening in certain pockets right now, and we won't be successful as a youth development organization until everyone can put aside their own personal beliefs and truly support (redacted) 4-H being ‘An Equal Opportunity Institution.’”
Interview Data

I conducted interviews with three sets of participants. I conducted agent interviews, in-state administrator interviews and out of state administrator interviews. In the following sections, I reported the finding of each group.

Agent Interviews.

I conducted semi-structured interviews individually with four survey participants. I posed eight open-ended questions to each person, with unlimited time given for them to expand on their answers (Appendix B). I recorded all interviews on a hand-held device. I informed all participants that they could stop the interview at any time.

In Question 1, I asked, “In what way has your program been impacted by a transgender youth?” Two of the four agents replied they had a transgender member enrolled. One agent was unaware of transgender members in their county program but knew of transgender members in their district. While not aware of any specific person in their program, the other agent stated, “I’m aware they (transgender members) exist.”

One of the agents described situations of being asked questions about camp from family members and what-if questions and concerns from other members and parents. A different agent related that a member identifying as transgender had participated in overnight events while still identifying as their gender assigned at birth but had not attended an overnight event since identifying as transgender. Another agent described a situation when a transgender member was interested in participating in their district camping program. Several agents were working on a plan to accommodate everyone, but the member decided not to attend, citing a conflict with another event.
All agents made statements indicating that their program or the leaders had not been proactive toward transgender members. They stated that the current program did not welcome or encourage all to thrive, and there was much confusion in navigating the needs (of transgender members) respectfully and privately. One agent asked questions but had not received answers from anyone even years later. The agent relating the example of working on camping plans for the transgender member was not convinced that the member had a conflict with another event. The agent felt that the change in plans might have been related to the difficulty the agent and member had in getting their questions answered.

I asked in Question 2, "Do you as an agent feel you met the needs of this child? Please explain why?" One agent answered yes to this question because their office had single-use bathrooms, and they offered day camps where transgender members could participate. This agent also reported overhearing cisgender youth discussing the situation within their day camp, and they were all okay with it and had no issues. This agent added that parents were the issue.

The agent who told about the member who chose not to attend the overnight camping event stated, "We were asking questions, making accommodations. If they did (attend), we would not have been ready." They went on to say that state administrators handled these questions on a case-by-case basis. The agent pointed out that state administrators tried to figure out what to do reactively instead of proactively.

Another agent described a situation where a transgender member wanted to apply to the state (reasons undisclosed), and the application asked for a picture of the applicant. The youth had recently transitioned and could not afford new clothes to align with the current gender identity. The youth expressed concern that their picture would not match their stated gender, and there was a gender-specific scoring rubric for appearance. The agent indicated they wanted to be
helpful but did not feel educated enough to inform the application judges. The scoring rubric was potentially discriminatory against this youth as well.

Another agent answered they had mixed feelings about meeting the needs of the child. The agent explained they were aware of a youth’s transgender status, but it was not told to them by parents or the youth member. The agent could not fully meet the needs without asking the family questions, and they would have liked it if the parents felt more comfortable telling them the truth. That agent felt the parents had potential fears about disclosing.

I asked in interview Question 3, “Did you as an agent need clarification or assistance with any 4-H rules or regulations because of this person’s participation? Please explain.” All four agents responded yes. Two agents shared that they had questions about residential camping, accommodations such as cabins and bathhouses, and expectations and rules. One agent described having questions because they were aware of the youth's transgender status but not because of their disclosure. The agent wanted to know whether, if this youth attended an overnight event in the future, the agent should bring up the youth's transgender status or go with whatever gender identity was on the documents.

Agents referred to the lack of response from the people they asked for clarification or assistance. Two agents stated they never received any responses. One agent said they wanted a "principles of guidance" document to refer to in order to know what they were supposed to do, and what they were permitted to ask. One agent said they were aware of discussions on how to proceed happening at the state level.

I then asked Question 4, “If you asked for help or clarification, whom did you ask, and did you receive the information or guidance you needed?” Agents related asking a variety of people for assistance, including state and camping administrators, regional specialized agents
(RSA), district-level and state-level faculty members, and State 4-H office members. Many times, the agents asked more than one person for assistance. All agents expressed concern about not receiving the information or guidance needed.

One agent was unsure of everyone they asked but did remember explicitly asking one particular person. He related that he knew they worked on something but never saw anything come to fruition. When one agent began to presume a youth was transgender, they reached out for support. The response was for the agent to go with the status quo if no one directly told them about a youth's transgender status. This agent did not feel comfortable asking any questions of the youth based on this advice.

Another agent said of everyone he contacted, ”Nobody knew much.” None of the individuals provided information or guidance. According to the agent, there were statements about discussing and deciding on a case-by-case basis, but there would not be a written policy. This agent felt the administration team members lacked a proper understanding of the county situations and need for guidance.

Lastly, the agent who described dealing with the transgender member’s application and scoring rubric, cited that incident as an example of one time he felt supported by the person he contacted. After much back-and-forth discussion between the two people, they figured out how to make the judges aware so the youth would not be penalized for non-conformance based on what the rubric listed as proper dress for specific genders. The agent was unaware if the gender-specific scoring rubric underwent any changes as a result.

I focused on agent perceptions in Question 5, “As an agent, do you feel the (redacted) 4-H program is open to transgender youth? Why or why not?” Responses from all four agents indicated the program was not ready to accommodate the needs of the transgender population.
even though organizational leaders say it was. Agents made statements such as, "We are in theory, but we are not set up," and "Willing but not ready." Another said, “We talk but not walk; we use open in a general sense but don’t reach out and don’t make accommodations. We don’t work on answers.” Another agent’s comments indicated the program leaders said the program was open to transgender youth, and the agent believed they wanted it to be open, but the program was not prepared to accommodate the needs of transgender youth. In their opinion, agents needed additional training, there needed to be more understanding of the needs, and there were more questions to be asked.

Expanding on their answer to Question 5, one agent posed questions that would need answers if the program became truly inclusive and accommodating for transgender members. They spoke specifically of the 4-H camping program, something the agent felt was strongly encouraged in the state under study. The agent asked what an accommodating camp would look like because there were currently boy and girl cabins. The agent posed the question, "What are you allowed to do?" then stated, "I wouldn't know what to do." There was also concern from this agent about the reaction from current funding sources and potential loss of funding if accommodations were provided. This agent indicated that the people in charge were reactive, not proactive, and 4-H was an open program. But agents had no policy on accommodating transgender members.

I asked each agent in Question 6: “As an agent, do you know if the (redacted) 4-H program has guiding principles for meeting the needs of transgender youth?” All four agents answered negatively. Three said they were unaware of any and had never seen any. One agent expressly stated, “We do not have a formal guide, but we are moving towards one.” One agent
indicated they had been an agent in the state under study for many years and had never seen one. Another agent went on to say that there were “no rules, principles, or answers.”

I asked another perspective question in Question 7: “Do you feel (redacted) 4-H should or should not have a statewide Gender Neutrality Policy for 4-H agents to follow? Please explain.” All four agents responded yes. One agent felt it would be helpful due to agent turnover and frequent rule changes. They indicated a policy would provide consistency and needed to answer the questions. Another agent stated it was important for the program’s inclusivity status and should incorporate all genders; “These kids need us the most.” This agent also felt being more inclusive would expand the minds of all youth and allow youth to see the commonalities they all share.

Another agent qualified that there should be a policy as long as it benefitted all youth. They also stated it was a complex situation that needed addressing and was essential to the program as youth age because of more overnight state events and hormones. The last agent said, “There needs to be back-end work; we must face the politics and funding fears, and many things need consideration. However, we cannot backtrack once we start.”

In the final question of the interview, I asked, “Is there anything else you feel the (redacted) 4-H administration should know about working with transgender youth? All agents responded to this question. One agent stated, “They’re just kids and they just want to be included.”

Another agent stated, “These youth are out there, and if we are open, then follow through and make it a reality. Don’t wait for the situation.” This last statement, “Don’t wait for the situation,” referenced the case-by-case reactive handling currently being done. "Don't put the onus on the family; put it on us to create the environment." This agent stated there were
conflicting messages from administrators regarding pronouns. They closed their answer with, "Why are we having conversations as opposed to it just happening?"

The primary message from another agent was to be proactive, not reactive. They felt the proactive stance would come with training and professional development for all levels of faculty, staff, and volunteers. They stated, "We need to have someone in 4-H that specializes and truly understands." This agent felt the policy should make a statement and answer the questions now what, and what-if? They added that administrators should review the policy at least annually as societal changes continue.

One agent responded, “When [state under study] 4-H creates (a policy) or faces the situation, bring transgender youth to the table to tell us their needs so we are sure to build equity and inclusion the right way.” This agent indicated a need to address the housing situation soon as they demonstrated that agents were already handling issues without guidance. In addition, this agent described supervising a transgender youth they were not familiar with as the youth was from a different county. They stated:

The way we travel, not every agent attends every event. Youth and parents had to disclose to me, and I had to deal with making sure [the youth] was protected and [their] needs were met best that I could. The youth was housed by gender assigned at birth. The [guiding] principles would help with housing, sharing with a supervising agent, privacy protection, and addressing the situations that have been faced with traditional housing.

In-state Administrator Interviews.

In the state under study, two administrators had the authority to make policies, rules, and decisions related to the state 4-H program. I conducted semi-structured interviews with both administrators individually using the same eight-question tool (Appendix C).
To begin, I asked Question 1: “Is the (state under study) 4-H program a diverse, open, and inclusive program for all youth ages 5-18?” The administrators differed in their answers to this question. One administrator answered yes, while the other administrator was not as sure. The administrator who was not sure stated, “We want to be, but our numbers don’t indicate so, not in every delivery mode and county.” This administrator described how the program had changed over time, removed barriers, and had come far. They credited agents for taking the initiative and reaching out to diverse communities. They explained that the increased diversity within the faculty and volunteer ranks helped the program reach more diverse youth, stating the program has been getting “better and better every year, but we have a long way to go.”

Moving on, I asked Question 2: “Does [redacted] 4-H have any written policies that address the issue of Gender Neutrality? If yes, to what policy(ies) are you referring?” Both administrators stated they did not know of a specific policy. They were aware of either conversations or some information that was available. When asked to clarify the available information they referenced, the administrator said there were notes and guidelines from a national diversity committee to reference but they had not seen anything formal. They then stated, “It’s unclear what a policy would need to look like. Just tell me what a youth needs, and let’s resolve it.”

For Question 3, I asked both administrators: “Have you, as an administrator, been approached by county faculty concerning issues related to transgender youth who may or may not have been (redacted) 4-H members? Please describe the issues.” County faculty had approached both administrators. One administrator recounted an incident when a transgender youth wanted to serve as a residential camp counselor. The issue was whether the youth attended camp as the sex assigned at birth or as their gender identity. The administrator related that there
were discussions about the potential reactions of others but the desire was to make decisions, so the youth felt wanted and included. The situation was resolved when the youth changed what they wanted to do. This administrator described it as a missed opportunity and added that room assignments at residential events seemed to be the most common issue brought to their attention. They stated, “I trust if they have identified a gender, shouldn’t they be assigning rooms by their identity? Whoever this youth is, they belong in 4-H.” However, this administrator did not recollect a situation where they were aware of a final decision being made or carried out. The other administrator interviewed indicated having conversations about transgender youth. They believed no one had inhibited transgender youths’ membership, made them feel uncomfortable or discouraged them from participating.

Following up on the previous question, I asked Question 4: “Have you provided answers to any faculty concerning lodging issues for transgender members at an overnight 4-H event? Please elaborate.” Both administrators provided answers concerning lodging issues at overnight 4-H events. One administrator responded they had provided answers to faculty a couple of times. Both times were long ago, and they could not remember specific details. They did remember the incidents were related to the residential camping program and based on conversations; the county faculty proposed good strategies. This administrator believed the resolutions were to provide separate areas to house the transgender members.

The other administrator stated that there were several issues related to room assignments. The legal department had to be involved to ensure the solutions were legal and everyone’s rights were observed. While the administrator was unaware of the resolutions, the different situations created several questions. They related questions regarding possible solutions: Would erecting a privacy screen in a transgender youth’s room just bring attention to their difference rather than
recognizing their identified gender? Did anyone ask the youth what they wanted? If an event permitted youth to choose roommates, how was that handled? This administrator expressed that there were many more questions to be answered but was hopeful every youth felt wanted in 4-H.

For Question 5, I asked: “Have you felt unable to provide accommodations for transgender members or youth during any 4-H event or activity? Please elaborate.” Neither administrator said they felt unable to provide accommodations. One reported, “Not sure how it was resolved but I attempted.” The other administrator said, “From conversations I’ve been involved in, we’ve been able to make them.”

The next question was related to a gender neutrality policy in the state under study. Question 6 was: “Do you, as an administrator, have any current plans to initiate a Gender Neutrality Policy for the (state under study) 4-H program? Why or why not?” The two administrators had differing answers. One administrator stated a policy was under discussion with two 4-H administrators in the state under study. The other administrator was not sure and related a discussion with agents where there was a plan for a transgender member to be given a time for showers after everyone else had finished. The administrator, realizing the impact of that plan, said, “If that doesn’t make (the transgender members) feel different…” This administrator stated, “I want to understand it better – I don’t know. We need to know what the transgender youth want.” Their concern was not knowing what the transgender members wanted, so they were unsure how a policy could be written.

I asked Question 7: “Do you, as an administrator, have any current plans to adapt the state 4-H online enrollment program to include more than two traditional gender choices? Why or why not?” One administrator responded, “This is important. There is a need. I don’t know what is appropriate.” They described projects they were involved in to adapt the online
enrollment program. One project provided five options for people to choose from under gender, while the second project had fewer options but included ‘other’ as one of the options. The administrator wondered, “Is ‘other’ rude?” They stated that project coordinators each defended the options for gender by claiming to have research justifying and supporting them as an appropriate way to collect the information.

The final question, Question 8, was: “Is there anything else related to the topic of Gender Neutrality in the (state under study) 4-H program you feel would be important to this research and report? Please be detailed.” One of the administrators said (paraphrased):

In my experience with 4-H, our people are open inclusive minded. These are waters needing navigating. It will get political, and there will be forces to be reckoned with, people and forces that don’t see things the same way. We need to be ready to answer questions. We need to be inclusive and get that message across to our stakeholders. We must be inclusive in a way that does not exclude anyone and doesn’t hurt the program.

The other administrator’s answer involved more questions. They expressed concern about whether 4-H leaders could create a policy for everyone. They asked, “Do you think there will be a difference between rural and urban acceptance?” In explaining further, they expressed concerns that more densely populated urban areas would have more transgender people, more support systems and, therefore, might have more acceptance and tolerance. In addition, they felt some rural areas may come with a more specific (closed) mindset and may not be as accepting of LGBTQ individuals. In closing, they said:

What do agents need to hear from me to be clear of my expectations: we are making 4-H a place of belonging? What does the message need to be? We have to have a clear value statement. We owe it to the faculty to understand the leadership’s values with this; what I
mean by that is potentially mine. If someone doesn’t want this, I’m not sure I can listen to
them. I haven’t listened to them before. If we are trying to do the right thing for kids, are
we the best youth organization or not?

**Out-of-state Administrator Interviews.**

I conducted semi-structured interviews individually with four administrators in 4-H
programs outside the state under study. I did not know about these programs related to having a
gender neutrality policy. I selected states with varying populations, political histories, and
geographic areas. Of those administrators responding and following through on the interview
process, two had 4-H programs of over 150,000 members, one had about 90,000, and one had
about 50,000. The administrators headed programs in different areas throughout the United
States.

I divided the interview questions (Appendix D) into three parts: before a gender
neutrality policy existed, during the induction of a policy (if applicable), and after the policy
adoption (if applicable). There were multiple questions for each section, with numerous follow-
up questions proposed depending on their answers. I provided participants with the questions
before the interview to help them prepare. I recorded all participant interviews for review and
gave each person the option to stop at any time. None opted to end early.

I asked the administrators, “What barriers did you encounter to creating fully inclusive
programming?” Barriers identified by the administrators included understanding how to become
more inclusive, how to build the skills needed, and how to provide professional development.
Administrators gave examples of discomfort among faculty and staff related to camp and gender
identity changes as well as positive and negative attention resulting from an LGBTQ event.

I asked a secondary question as a follow-up to the question about barriers: How did you
overcome those barriers? Administrator responses included promoting success stories and monitoring and addressing instances of negativity. One administrator explained (paraphrased):

> Trust and support came from the diversity, equity, and inclusion work. It takes work to explain the why, so I calmly communicated the why. We used positive youth development principles and understood that risk tolerance is a personal choice. Gender identity is included in the non-discrimination policy for national 4-H, so we referred to that throughout the professional development and volunteer training we provided. We started with internal changes first; we had good 4-H administrator support. We got mixed reviews from faculty and staff across the state when we made policy changes at state-level training. Again, we had to keep reviewing the why because some thought it was not an issue in 4-H. We emphasized the purpose behind the policy and engaged the resisters in conversations, and shared positive personal stories.

The next question I asked was: “Did you encounter resistance from administrators, stakeholders, membership, and the community at large? If so, what type?” Responses included that resistance was “usually religion-based and comes from adults, not youth” and “parents.” Another response was that the community at large offered the most resistance and community members stated that 4-H was already inclusive, and the 4-H leaders should not push the issue.

The next question was: “Who were the ones who offered the most support for this policy?” Two administrators identified the educators in the system. Other people mentioned that those offering the most support included the 4-H level administrators, the university Extension director, the university in general, and the national 4-H leaders.

The final question for this part of the interview was: “Did you ever feel you or your job was threatened if you pursued this issue?” Two administrators responded to this question. One
said no. The other administrator was aware that it could have been an issue, but university leaders supported them and protected their job.

In the next part of the interview, I asked questions related to the time during the implementation of the gender-neutral policy. The first question I posed to the administrators was: What did your early attempts at policy look like? Administrators referred to embedding diversity statements in policies, position descriptions, and codes of conduct for faculty, staff and volunteers, sharing documents that referenced inclusion and pushing information forward when efforts were lagging. Administrators also reported offering more than two gender choices in the 4-H online enrollment system.

The next question in the interview was: Did you pilot your ideas in any area or go straight to state policy? Responses to this question indicated no consistency in how each state administrator proceeded. One administrator reported they piloted at the state level first. In contrast, another administrator said they adopted a vision statement, then laid out the structure followed by piloting and advancing the policy at the state level. A third administrator provided a different answer stating they worked on strengthening existing guidelines and policies followed by promoting and enforcing them in the 4-H program.

I then asked: “Did you lose or gain any significant number of members while initiating [the policy]?” Two administrators responded to this question. One administrator indicated there was no evidence of gaining or losing members during the time leaders were initiating the policy. They referred to the COVID-19 pandemic and were unsure if the pandemic or the policy had made an impact. The other administrator indicated they did not lose membership but added, “We will attract more than we lose.” They also stated: “If I can have a calm conversation with them, I haven’t lost them. We are learning to respect choices without understanding or agreeing. Those
lost would never listen or conversate anyway.”

I asked administrators: “Were youth stepping forward and identifying as transgender, gender neutral, or nonbinary as you worked towards establishing policies?” Two administrators replied yes and qualified the number of youth as “some.” One administrator stated, “By showing inclusion and acceptance, the youth felt safe to reveal themselves. This, in turn, helped reaffirm the why behind making the changes.”

The last question I asked in this part of the interview was: “In your experiences, did you observe or hear of any youth mistreated, bullied, harassed, or otherwise negatively treated in relation to the issues?” Three administrators responded to this question. Two administrators responded that they had not heard or observed any instances. The other administrator related there had been a little bullying reported at camp but not necessarily related to the youth being LGBTQ.

In the final phase of the interviews, I asked questions related to the 4-H program in the state after the adoption of the policy. I asked the first question: “What is the current situation relating to this policy?” One administrator stated they were still working on adopting a policy, but it was a several-year process. Another administrator referred to a situation where a stakeholder questioned one part of the policy, so they had been told to “put it on hold.”

I asked the next question: How do your membership numbers compare to pre-policy? Administrators responding to this question indicated there was no loss of members. However, there was an opinion that, due to COVID-19, it was not possible to attribute the change or lack of change in membership numbers to the policy.

I then asked the administrators: “Did you lose or gain any major financial supporters as a result [of implementing the policy]?” There were either no losses or not any significant losses of
major financial supporters in the states represented by these administrators. One administrator was not sure they had gained any financial supporters as a result of the policy, while another administrator reported gaining small donors specifically because of their inclusion policy. An administrator noted there had been threats of financial and supporter losses, but “nothing comes of it – overall 4-H is too important.”

I asked administrators: “If you were starting over with the implementation of this policy, what, if anything, would you do differently?” One administrator stated they would “put more attention on middle management of our system, like County Extension Directors.” This administrator elaborated by stating they would “provide more professional development for them.”

My next question was: “In your experiences, has this policy improved, hurt, or not affected your 4-H program?” There were no responses that the policy had hurt the program. One administrator replied that the policy had improved the program. They specifically stated, “Hiring, onboarding, professional development – all have made a positive change and progression. I have heard from teens how good it feels.”

The next question was: “Is your 4-H program better suited to meet the ideology of 4-H, provide Positive Youth Development as a result of the process and the policy?” Administrators responded affirmatively to this question. One administrator explained that the policy had allowed them to create a sense of belonging for everyone.

My final question for administrators in states other than the state under study was: “Is there anything else related to the topic of Gender Neutrality in a 4-H program you feel would be important to this research and report? Please be detailed.” Two administrators responded to this question. One administrator stated that 4-H needed to keep up with communities, make sure
that it serves everyone, and battle the fear of change, adding, “4-H is in a moment where we can move in an inclusive direction and make us relevant. Adopt or die.” The second administrator responded, “The teeth and power of guidelines have to be a passion of our faculty and staff. Professional development is key, and they must be invested in it first.”

**Contexts**

In describing their four Cs of leadership change, Wagner et al. defined context as, “The larger organizational systems within which we work, and their demands and expectations, formal and informal” (2006, p. 104). There are multiple levels of context. The levels range from local to global, and together they impact how change leaders can transform culture, conditions, and competencies, the other three Cs.

The topics of gender-questioning, gender-neutrality, and transgender are very controversial, especially when they involve children choosing their own identities. Both political and religious opinions mar the current conversations related to gender (Behrmann, 2021). As the country was very politically divided in 2021, it was challenging to make gender-related statements without creating hostility or disagreement. It was a record-breaking year for anti-transgender legislation (Krishnakumar, 2021). At the time of this study, in the state of Florida, Governor DeSantis was repealing previous legislation passed to protect transgender rights (Michael, 2021).

All 4-H programs are federal programs and therefore must, by law, refrain from any political lobbying and provide a religiously neutral program. However, the funding still comes from the political organizations which stakeholders govern with personal opinions. Several agents surveyed indicated the fear that money and stakeholder losses would prevent administrators from creating policies or formalizing answers related to transgender member
housing and facilities questions. During my professional experience, this had been expressed to me by multiple agents and faculty when discussing the need for such guidelines. There was a genuine concern for loss of funding if 4-H “came out” as supportive and open to transgender children.

In addition to federal funds, 4-H received a large portion of their support from state and local organizations, many agriculture-related. Cattlemen’s associations, Farm Bureaus, and Ag-related grant programs are examples of agencies providing support. However, agents had indicated that these organizations were still governed by elderly men and ruled by what they called “the good ol’ boy network.”

While all 4-H programs were funded in part by federal monies, not all 4-H administrators interpreted the directives the same way. For example, over the years, there had been different responses to whether the Title IX Education Act includes gender identity as a protected population.

While discrimination based on gender was clearly understood, many people questioned whether it was on gender or chosen gender. Writing a Legal Sidebar for the Congressional Research Service, Legislative Attorney Jared P. Cole wrote:

Most public school districts and universities receive federal funds. They must therefore comply with Title IX or risk losing federal funding if ED finds a violation of Title IX’s requirements. But while the statute explicitly prohibits discrimination “because of … sex,” it is silent on whether that term includes a person’s asserted gender identity or otherwise prohibits discrimination against transgender students. (Cole, 2020, p. 2)

The 4-H membership in the state under study experienced a significant increase in members reporting themselves as homeschooled. During the 2019-2020 4-H year,
homeschoolers accounted for 10.9% of the membership. In 2020-2021 this increased to 18.8%, and this rise remained in effect into 2021-2022 at 18.2% (citation withheld for confidentiality). According to the Universal Life Church, in writing about reasons families homeschool, “One of the most common reasons is because people want their children to be raised in a more moral or religious environment” (2015, para. 1). More recently, in 2020, Elena Trueba wrote, “The most current (albeit limited) data on homeschoolers tells us that they are generally Christian (66 percent), above the poverty threshold (79 percent), and white (83 percent)” (2020, para. 3). Trueba also noted that homeschooling K-12 curricula is marketed to a conservative, evangelical audience and cited her own “troubling messages about religion, race, and the origins of the United States that I encountered in the world of Christian homeschooling” (para. 2).

Gender identity is often confused with, or lumped in with, the subject of homosexuality (Pappas, 2014). Again, this is a very controversial topic, especially when religion is involved. “Most Christians in the United States (63%) say that whether someone is a man or a woman is determined by their sex at birth” (Smith, 2017, para. 2). Considered a sin or sinful behavior, transgender (or gender-questioning) individuals are labeled perverted, predatory, or deviant (Hughto et al., 2015). Bruce Ashford, a provost at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, reported in 2018 on his interactions over several years with pastors and churches (Ashford, 2018). In this report, under the question of “What does the Bible have to say about gender identity,” he wrote:

The Bible teaches that God created human beings to be either male or female (Genesis 1:27). God designed us so that our “gender” should align with our biological sex. When we attempt to nullify or suppress that design, we will meet with frustration and failure. Even though doctors might mutilate a person’s body to conform to that person’s
preferences, our God-given gender identities are not pliable or interchangeable. We are
designed beings; no matter how hard we try to suppress God’s design, we cannot. (para.
7)
The topic of sexuality is very different from gender. Still, when discussing housing or facility
use, the arguments were usually related to sexuality and predatory behaviors (Scherer, 2016,
para. 9; Erickson-Schroth & Jacobs, 2017, p. 76). Not having written guidelines or policies
appeared to be one way administrators avoided controversy and criticism.

According to Maslow’s Hierarchy and youth development research, a sense of belonging
is essential for positive youth development (Maslow, 1954; Tessman et al., 2009). Based on the
surveys and interviews with 4-H agents in the state under study, this sense of belonging did not
apply to all youth as part of the context. Also, based on the surveys and interviews, some agents
were not sure how to create this sense of belonging.

Culture

Wagner et al. (2006) defined culture, the second C of change leadership, as “Shared
values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors” as they relate to students, teachers,
leadership, and relationships (p. 102). Agents responding to the survey indicated the culture of
the 4-H program in the state under study was reactive, not proactive. Rather than have policies or
procedures, situations were handled case by case privately and not shared with the organization’s
faculty. For example, one agent indicated that the lack of written guidelines meant there was
nothing to support them if they chose to accommodate a transgender youth. Another agent wrote,
“I don’t have the support of (state) 4-H to handle those who question my accommodations.”

There were many counties in the state under study. Without a state policy to guide agents, each
county could handle these situations differently. However, agents expressed concern about not
being supported in their decisions even though there was no policy to guide them.

An administrator in the state under study referenced the loss of stakeholder support as an important topic when discussing the need for a written policy. Several agents also referenced money and funding and fear. They specified that one traditional stakeholder organization had members who stood as anti-LGBTQ and indicated they felt the program would lose this stakeholder group’s support if leaders created and implemented a written policy.

All four agents interviewed indicated that leaders handled situations involving transgender youth reactively on an individual case basis. Referring to administrators and experiences as reactive instead of proactive was a common theme repeated multiple times by each interviewed faculty member. Unfortunately, there were no written answers, no guiding principles to follow, and the inquiring agents never felt they received the answers they needed.

One agent I interviewed stated several times that administrators said they were working on something to address the accommodations questions for transgender participants. However, it had been several years, and they were still waiting. Another agent stated administrators told them there would be no policy, only case-by-case decisions. All four agents indicated they never received actual answers to their questions. In two situations, the youth planning to attend changed their plans and did not attend an overnight event. While the administration appeared to have a top-down approach to decision-making, it was being done reactively instead of proactively, leaving agents to wait for decisions and answers.

For events held at the state level, primarily with teenage youth, dress codes were in place and specific to each gender. There were some competitive events where youth received general instructions such as how to look professional when being interviewed by a judging panel. The organizers gave examples of the professional dress by gender. One agent reported having a
member ask about abiding by the professional dress code but not for the gender they identified. The youth was concerned about being penalized for not conforming to the gender-specific dress code. Specifically, they voiced concern because one entry on the rubric was related to the appearance of the youth and instructed judges on what was appropriate by gender. Multiple inquiries and discussions occurred because the agent did not want to violate the youth’s right to privacy, but they also had concerns about the adult judges reacting negatively. Again, this agent reported that leaders handled the situation based on the specific issue, but no general rules or guidelines were established or shared as a result. They felt if a similar situation regarding professional dress and scoring rubrics came up again, it would have to be discussed and decided all over again. Dress codes, however, were under review and could be removed or revised to avoid conflicts in the future.

When I asked agents if the 4-H program in the state under study was open to transgender youth (Agent Interview Question Five), all agents consistently answered that it was not and explained:

- Willing but not ready;
- We don’t work on answers;
- We talk the talk but don’t walk the walk;
- We say we are, we want to be, but we are not; and
- We are in theory, but we are not set up; I for one would not know what to do.

One agent felt individual counties might be open and ready, citing single-use bathrooms as an example, but felt the state program was not prepared. These agent responses indicated the topic of transgender and nonbinary members remained a taboo topic never directly addressed by administrators.
When I asked agents specifically if the state 4-H program under study should or should not have a Gender Neutrality Policy, all answered yes. One agent requested clarification about what type of policy this would be. I defined two related terms for the agent. First, gender-neutral: “not referring to either sex but only to people in general” (Merriam-Webster, 2021), and second, gender-neutrality: “the idea that policies, language, and other social institutions should avoid distinguishing roles according to people's sex or gender” (Wikipedia, 2021). Another agent replied, “These youth are out there, and if we are open, follow through and make it a reality. Don’t wait for the situation.”

These interviewed agents shared the need for something formal and in writing that answered the questions asked over the years. This policy would also convey the message of being open and inclusive to all persons. The state under study had experienced turnover among 4-H agents, and one agent stated that the rules were constantly changing. All agents felt there was nothing to guide decisions or provide guidance at the county or state level. One agent specified that much “back-end” work would need to happen in preparation for political and religious pushback and stakeholder threats. Agents felt that monetary loss would need consideration, but there should be no back-tracking once the organization moved forward. If the stakeholders did not truly support an open, inclusive, and equitable environment, leaders of the program needed to thank them and move forward without them. An administrator made nearly the same statement. They stated that “there were people/forces that don’t see things the same way, and it can get political; we have to be prepared for pushback.” They did feel the 4-H programs needed to be inclusive and that this message should be delivered to the supporters and stakeholders. However, this administrator was unaware of any current policy or guidelines but
believed the general issue was under discussion, admitting no knowledge about the current debate.

In data collected through agent surveys, some agents expressed the concern that they were expected to make decisions at a county level but would not have the support of administrators if the decision resulted in conflict. County faculty did not feel they were supposed to be making decisions related to personal rights, lodging, bathroom use, and so on. They felt these decisions should be provided in guidelines at the least, preferably in policy, that all personnel would follow consistently.

Based on survey and interview answers, the shared assumption was that administrators would not address the issue or make decisions, and no policy or guidelines were forthcoming. However, 100% of agents responding in surveys and in interviews expressed the need for such guidelines. Even though some agents reported hearing administrators were working on policies, the administrators interviewed indicated they were not working on a policy or that one was necessary.

Conditions

The third C of change leadership involves conditions. Wagner et al. (2006) defined conditions as “the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources” (p. 101). Conditions include a wide range of topics such as the physical building in which students learn, and student-to-teacher ratios. It is also about time, “Time spent with and for kids, with colleagues, with parents, with the community” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 101).

According to multiple land-grant university sites, the Cooperative Extension system is a partnership between federal, state, and county governments (Cornell, n.d., para. 3; University of
In my experience, personnel was required to be in compliance with policies and regulations from all levels. In addition, faculty salaries may have come from multiple sources, with some receiving both county and state paychecks. Multi-county agents had to comply with even more county policies. Something as simple as office holidays could be confusing as the county administrators recognized different ones. Administrators expected agents to know and follow all policies, rules, regulations, and directives and find ways to cover related expenses.

Leaders who release policies or directives from any level may not always have a funding source. County agents relied on local stakeholders, community support, and grant writing to subsidize their budgets. For example, when state departments in charge of child safety nationwide initiated a law requiring all volunteers working with children to undergo a high-level federal screening, no funds were provided by the governing bodies adopting the mandate. A review of prices revealed they varied from county to county, and county agents had to secure the monies to complete these screenings. The size of the county and the number of volunteers determined the impact on their budgets.

In the state under study, the information provided by administrators and agents interviewed for this research indicated state funds covered little more than a portion of faculty salaries. Administrators and agents generally used county funds for a portion of salaries and office supplies. Periodically, state and county technology funds were made available for computer replacement and other related equipment. A partial list of expenses every agent covered across the state included program materials, educational materials and equipment, facility rental (such as horse arenas, shooting ranges, and dog agility courses), volunteer screening fees, awards, recognition items, marketing materials, advertising, registration
scholarships, and some professional development. These conditions created the need to rely heavily on local stakeholders and community supporters for funding. This also added another set of responsibilities to the county 4-H agents' list of duties, as soliciting donations and maintaining relationships with those donors was essential and time-consuming.

Other conditions were related to agents and administrators' relationships with stakeholders and community members. The time spent with these stakeholders and community members was time agents were not spending educating youth. An administrator in the state under study said, “I think there are people/forces that really don’t see things the same way. Can get political.” Some of the questions and concerns expressed by administrators during interviews were:

– Traditional stakeholders, not open to change.
– Fear of the unknown; will funding, support, and memberships be lost?
– Too much top-down authority with no input from the agents working directly with the youth and stakeholders
– Counties are very much dependent on stakeholder support, community fundraising, and county government
– Counties, then districts, then state – the structure is not conducive to the “case by case” actions of the administrators, too many differences

Competencies

The fourth and final C of change leadership, as defined by Wagner et al. (2006), is competencies. These are the skills and knowledge of competent adults that influence student learning (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 99). Ongoing professional development is necessary to continually improve and increase these competencies for teachers and all levels of
I addressed competencies of the 4-H faculty in Questions 2, 3, 4, and 8 of the agent interviews (see Appendix B).

2. Do you as an agent feel you met the needs of this child? Please explain why.

3. Did you as an agent need clarification or assistance with any 4-H rules or regulations because of this person’s participation? Please explain.

4. If you asked for help or clarification, whom did you ask, and did you receive the information or guidance you needed?

8. Is there anything else you feel the 4-H administration should know about working with transgender youth?

In answering these four questions, no agent mentioned any professional development or training offered related to this specific topic. While there had been an increase in diversity and inclusion training as evidenced by those provided nationally and locally to Extension agents, the focus was on race, ethnicity, and culture. None of the responding agents indicated that they were knowledgeable or prepared to create a gender-inclusive program.

For Question 2, I asked agents if they felt they met the needs of the transgender youth in their program and to explain why. Agents responded by saying they did not know enough to know if they were meeting the needs. The consensus among the interviewed agents was that nobody in their program knew what to do. They all felt they were trying to meet the needs of their participants in some ways within county programs, but nothing was happening on a state level. One agent shared that agents were not aware of what they were permitted to ask or how to ask the questions without being offensive or invasive.

For Questions 3 and 4, I asked agents if they needed clarification or assistance with any
4-H rules or regulations related to having a transgender participant in their programs and, if so, who they asked. I then asked if they had received the information needed. All interviewed agents stated that they had asked state-level administrators and were still waiting for answers, even years later.

Agents shared their work experience, ranging from having five to 15 years working in the 4-H program under study. Their individual responses were consistent:

- No guidance for camp. We still have questions.
- Need to know what I can and should do.
- I have asked; I’m still waiting on answers.
- I have gone to the state camping director, the assistant 4-H program leader, and my regional specialized agent; nobody had answers.
- We are expected to go to administration each time; all case by case; administration will not give agents general answers.

**Interpretation**

Overall, society is evolving and accepting gender and sexuality as multi-faceted. The evolution was evident as I found more literature, research, and policies related to gender identity, identifying pronouns, and nonbinary gender lists dated in the past five years. These topics become more challenging to discuss when children are the subject and adults must make decisions. In interpreting the results of my research, I saw a significant division between what administrators were set on doing and what agents in the field wanted to be done in the state under study. Agents had asked for, wanted, and believed that what was needed was a written policy or set of guidelines regarding gender neutrality. They wanted their 4-H programs to be open, inclusive, and inviting, but they expressed concern about the state under study not being
accommodating or ready for such changes. Leaders in other states had successfully implemented
gender neutrality policies, but each state took years and required many conversations, versions,
and training programs. According to the agents interviewed, the administrators in the state under
study were not in the process of discussing these options. Agents were doing training for agents,
but not specifically about policies. Neither administrator in the state under study indicated any
such policy was in the works, nor was it planned in the future of their program.

Overall, the topic of gender identity is more pronounced in society and has sparked a
great deal of debate. While some states had passed Bathroom Bills denying people the right to
use the bathroom most aligned with their gender identity, others had adopted legislation adding
public accommodation use to anti-discrimination laws. According to Ballotpedia, the self-
described encyclopedia for American politics:

As of June 2018, 18 states and the District of Columbia had adopted anti-discrimination
laws that included protections for transgender people. Generally speaking, these laws
applied to employment, housing, and public accommodations… As of June 2018, there
was no federal anti-discrimination law that provided protections on the basis of sexual
orientation or gender identity (2021, para. 5).

Judgments

In looking back to the research questions I posed when I began this work, there is still
much work to be done in the state under study. My research questions were:

1) How do 4-H staff and faculty create open, inviting, and inclusive programs that
meet the needs of all youth?

2) What is the current administrative policy for handling topics such as bathroom use
and lodging at 4-H events?
3) What barriers exist in the development of gender-neutral policies in 4-H for the state under study?

4) What county 4-H program(s) have recently dealt with a transgender or related membership issue?

5) How can the 4-H program more effectively fulfill the mission and vision statements for all youth without discrimination?

In answering Research Question 2, “What is the current administrative policy for handling topics such as bathroom use and lodging at 4-H events?” there was no policy. Administrators and agents both stated they took each case under consideration as it came up, and there were no written guidelines for use in county programs. The common term used was reactive, and agents were requesting administrators become proactive. Several agents reported never getting a clear answer or that the issues were in the process of being addressed, but nothing came of this.

In Research Question 3, I asked, “What barriers exist in the development of gender-neutral policies in 4-H for the state under study?” Based on interviews and surveys, the barriers seemed to be fear of stakeholder and funding losses. Administrators did not want to put anything in writing, yet they believed the programs were open and inclusive to all. Agents expressed concerns about pandering to organizations that openly opposed rights for those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning. Another barrier was the lack of professional development and training related to creating inclusivity and belonging for transgender and nonbinary youth. Agents indicated they were not familiar with the needs of these specific populations, unsure of how to create safe places for them, or how to incorporate appropriate volunteer training into their county programs.

This last point also applied to my first research question, “How do 4-H staff and faculty
create open, inviting, and inclusive programs that meet the needs of all youth?” One step would be to become familiar with and use inclusive language. State 4-H administrators can help counties by adopting gender-neutral dress codes and requiring enrollment and registration forms to have open-ended gender identity questions. In my personal experience, while conducting this research and monitoring changes made by myself and others, it was noted that using pronouns in signature lines and introductions also creates an inviting environment. Agents can help create a more open environment in their office by creating gender-neutral bathroom facilities or by making it clear that people can use the bathroom for the gender with which they identify.Posting safe space logos or signs in windows or on flyers can create an inviting, open, and inclusive environment.

The results of my study did not answer my fourth research question as clearly as the other questions. “What county 4-H program(s) have recently dealt with a transgender or related membership issue?” Only a few agents indicated they had interacted with youth who openly identified as transgender or nonbinary. This posed further questions such as, were transgender and nonbinary youth involved in the program but not self-disclosing, or were there very few even involved? Primarily, those agents who had such interactions and experiences indicated the youth participated on a county level, but questions and concerns about residential and state-level involvement were often unanswered. There was at least one success when an agent brought the gender-specific dress code to the attention of the adults involved. This agent reported a positive outcome for the youth and that the state-level specialists would review the gender-specific dress code recommendations. However, there were no changes announced at the time of my study, and this situation, like others, was handled reactively and was specific to this situation.

My fifth and final research question was, “How can the 4-H program more effectively
fulfill the mission and vision statements for all youth without discrimination?” To become an inclusive program, equitable and open to all youth, the 4-H program in the state under study needed to prepare and adopt a gender neutrality policy. This action would have provided consistent and formal answers to questions agents were asking. It would send a clear message to the state’s population that 4-H provides a safe and inclusive environment where all youth can experience positive youth development, welcome, and a sense of belonging is more important than politics. It would inform staff, faculty, and volunteers that 4-H does not discriminate against any population of youth and welcomes all without restrictions. It would send the message to those stakeholders if they were not willing to accept all youth without judgment; 4-H was not the program for them.

Similar policies are currently in existence in states across the United States. There was no indication that the adoption of these policies hurt or negatively impacted the 4-H programs in those states. On the contrary, state leaders felt they had improved and strengthened their programs by demonstrating a more inclusive, more accepting attitude towards the youth. Stakeholders and community members had sometimes opposed these policies but more supported them. In addition, youth were more open and accepting of differences than adults. There were no findings that indicated youth of any age contested the rights of their transgender and nonbinary peers to use their chosen names, pronouns, and bathrooms.

**Recommendations**

My recommendation is for the 4-H programs in the state under study to prepare and adopt a gender neutrality policy. Based on the previously reported findings, interpretations, and judgments, the next action step is to present this work to the current Extension and 4-H administrators in the state under study. As part of the presentation, a copy of the Program
Leaders Working Group document, *Practices for Inclusion of Individuals of All Genders and Sexual Orientations*, will be distributed to the administrators to develop the policy supported by this research. I recommend the leaders open discussions with other states who have already adopted the policy to counter the fears and contentions stopping them from moving forward.

While there will be multiple parts to a gender neutrality policy, a good starting point would be to develop a committee to work on a gender-neutral dress code policy for all events and activities in 4-H. This process can bring youth, administrators, agents, volunteers, and community members together to open discussions and begin with one small but critical part of the overall policy. Conversations could help individuals understand how many aspects of the 4-H program are gender-oriented. Creating gender-inclusive language for the dress code can also begin by using gender-inclusive language overall.

When something needs correcting, it is best to approach those in charge with ideas and possible solutions. Consequently, I will volunteer to serve on the policy writing committee and bring names of those invited to participate in suggestions for change. I have served on several diversity, equity, and inclusion teams and provided professional development workshops related to gender identity and gender neutrality. These training sessions and the team members will be offered as early opportunities to begin the conversation.

**Conclusion**

In brief, it is my recommendation that administrators stop believing case-by-case decisions are an appropriate way of dealing with the issue of gender identity. They must realize that all agents are not concordant, and unanswered questions remain after an extensive period. Transgender and nonbinary youth populations have grown. The legal system has settled many school situations in this issue. To avoid litigation and to be the most inclusive and welcoming
program for all youth, leaders in 4-H must take proactive steps now. In the following chapter, I outline a specific to-be framework for what 4-H can look like if policies are adopted and faculty, staff, and volunteers are educated on gender neutrality. This policy, known as the “To-Be” framework, discusses the development of future policies designed to be more inclusive for 4-H participants.
Chapter Five: To-Be Framework

During my research on gender neutrality policies in 4-H, I discovered critical disparities between the opinions of administrators and agents. First, the administrators need to be aware of what is happening in their county programs. More importantly, administrators need to know that agents are asking for written policies and guidelines to promote inclusion and that agents want answers to the questions they have been asking for years. Suppose agents and administrators work together to create a gender neutrality policy addressing and answering the questions coming from agent experiences. In that case, the 4-H program will become stronger, more inclusive, and provide a more effective environment for positive youth development.

My research findings also show that leaders of small and large 4-H programs across the United States have successfully enacted gender-neutral policies. In my vision for the future, these already existing policies, and the practices for inclusion provided by the national 4-H organization, will assist the administrators in the state under study in addressing some questions and stakeholder concerns. In addition, modeling what works elsewhere will give the state under study a head start in formulating policies and guidelines and supporting them.

Envisioning the Success To-Be

My vision of a successful future To-Be 4-H program in the state under study includes a superlative context, ideal culture, outstanding conditions, and distinctive competencies (Wagner et al., 2006). These bring together a program of excellence that will be accessible, equitable, and inclusive for all. In addition, it will consist of clear and concise policies, guidelines, and answers regarding gender identity. A visual diagram of this To-Be vision is found in Appendix F.

Future Context

A sense of belonging is essential for positive youth development. When a policy
addressing gender identity is adopted, the 4-H program in the state under study will continue to provide an environment focused on positive youth development. Still, it will be open and inclusive to more individuals. Gender neutrality is part of the non-discriminatory statements 4-H faculty will embrace to allow members to grow and expand. Open and inclusive language, professional development for faculty, staff, and volunteers, and caring adults modeling accepting behavior will create a safe place for all youth to belong.

The expansion of this 4-H program will include new adult volunteers who feel welcome and accepted. In addition, by creating applications with more inclusive language and presenting policies affirming gender identity as recognized in this organization, non-binary adults will feel it is safe to join the organization. “Inclusive language is the first step towards respect and fostering a supportive work climate” (Richards, 2021, p. 10). Richards also noted that referring to someone by their correct (chosen) pronouns, terms, and gender identity creates a safe workplace, important to a person’s ability to succeed (p. 10).

In this To-Be environment, politics will no longer play a role in decision-making regarding gender issues. More specifically, stakeholders will not threaten funding, and nondiscriminatory actions will be the norm. Faculty will know what to expect from administrators and will know what administrators expect from them. Agents will have the same answers to the same questions throughout the state under study because the policies will be explicit. Expectations will be consistent, and there will be no more delayed case-by-case decisions to await.

**Future Culture**

A culture of acceptance will include the use of preferred pronouns and chosen names for each person. When young people can express their identity in multiple ways (clothing, hairstyle,
name), they demonstrate a more positive state of mental health. Russell et al. (2018) reported their findings from research specifically with transgender youth, a subject limited in current research. “Depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior were at the lowest levels when chosen names could be used in all four contexts” (Russell et al., 2018, p. 503). Those contexts were at home, school, work, and friends.

Bathroom use is one of the most common topics for discussing gender identity. In an ideal situation, all bathrooms will be single-stall facilities where everyone has privacy. However, as that is not financially possible in most non-profit and educational programs such as 4-H programs, youth will be allowed to choose the bathroom most aligned with their identity. Proper training and education will alleviate the unfounded fears parents have of children being victimized by transgender or nonbinary individuals in restrooms. In their book, “You’re in The Wrong Bathroom!” authors Erickson-Schroth and Jacobs (2017) address 21 myths and misconceptions about gender non-conforming individuals. Myth number 12 is, “Trans People Are a Danger to Others, Especially Children” (p. 75). In addition, the authors shared their research in which they found that there were no arrest records for trans- or gender-nonconforming persons charged with sexual misconduct in a bathroom (p. 76).

Just the existence of a policy addressing both preferred pronouns and bathroom use will benefit youth by promoting positive mental health. Research by Russell et al. (2018) indicated when people used the youth’s chosen name, suicidal tendencies and depression decreased. In summarizing their findings, they wrote:

Policies that promote the social transition process of gender affirmation among transgender youth, such as chosen name use or access to restrooms consistent with gender identity or presentation, will likely enhance safety and reduce physical and mental health
By creating and implementing specific guidelines and policies about choosing names, preferred pronouns, and bathroom access during 4-H events, faculty and staff will have written directives to demonstrate these inclusive behaviors.

Professional development and training are essential to creating a positive, accepting culture. While attending these presentations will develop competency (see Future Competencies), the provision of these gender identity subject matter educational events demonstrates the commitment by administrators to recognize the topic as vital to the profession. The organization's culture will be enhanced, as gender identity will no longer be buried in generic diversity training, but rather, will be specified and talked about openly.

**Future Conditions**

Young people begin membership in 4-H by enrolling in the state’s online system. According to 4HOnline.com (2021), 46 states currently use 4HOnlinesm, including the state under study. As this is the doorway to the program, entering the gender for each participant is now an open-ended question, not one that forces a family to choose male, female, or not listed. An inclusive language built into this enrollment database will indicate to trans and nonbinary individuals that they are welcome and accepted.

Adult parents or legal guardians will continue to complete the enrollment forms because releases and agreements need their electronic signatures for legal reasons. This means it is still important for volunteer leaders and faculty to make it known that they want youth to share their own preferred names, pronouns, and even gender identity. Members will notify volunteer leaders and faculty by completing additional paperwork at events or meetings where inclusive language is used. In describing their framework for promoting gender identity determination and justice,
author sj Miller included providing open spaces for youth to self-define names, pronouns, and gender (Miller, 2019, p. 62). Miller wrote, “Stakeholders who advocate for complex gender identities invite students to self-define and/or reject claimed or preferred gender, name, and/or pronoun” (p. 62). Miller also recommends pronoun posters and inclusive space signs to create a welcoming environment (pp. 67-68), such as the New York State 4-H Safe Space sign pictured in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.**

*Safe Space sign*

When leaders provide a clear, concise, detailed policy and training, agents will no longer need to seek administrator decisions as situations arise. Three 4-H agents who participated in the research interviews described cases where they sought direction from administrators. Administrators delayed or did not provide answers, to the point that youth members and their parents decided not to attend the event. This deters individuals from remaining members as it affirms that they are different and not accepted or that special restrictions or accommodations are needed. Eliminating the need to ask for a case-by-case decision removes what sj Miller refers to as Cisgender Privilege or Cisprivilege (Miller, 2019, p. 34). In describing cisprivilege, Miller clarified that undenied access and recognition is given “without question” to cispeople (p. 34). This access includes bathrooms and social environments. By asking administrators for answers, the program leaders create cisprivilege and discriminatory practices. Therefore, a policy for all to follow would eliminate both issues.
Creating this welcoming and open environment will also minimize other negative behaviors such as bullying or mistreatment. Miller (2019) wrote, “…when the system fails to recognize students on a continuum of gender identities that are complex; they are made vulnerable to experiencing a cascade of dangerous negative habitus related consequences” (p. 43). As a result of having a sense of belonging and creating an environment of acceptance and understanding, trans and nonbinary individuals will be more likely to share their gender identity with other 4-H members. Once people see the 4-H program as one of inclusion, sending welcoming messages to trans and nonbinary individuals, membership in the 4-H program will increase. By feeling supported and safe, 4-H participants will experience positive youth development with the help of caring adults and thrive in their life skill progression.

**Future Competencies**

Faculty, staff, and volunteers in the 4-H program under study participate in interviews, some on multiple levels within the organization (office, county, state) before starting with the organization. In my To-Be vision of success, a panel of diverse people will conduct the interviews. During the interview, the panel will ascertain the attitude and understanding of each person on the topic of gender neutrality. For example, suppose the interviewee’s responses are unclear on the matter. In that case, the panel will need to determine whether this is a matter of not knowing or understanding and whether the person is receptive to learning and serving youth within an open and inclusive environment. By only hiring or selecting those willing to learn and providing a safe place for youth members to grow and thrive, 4-H will create a more competent team of caring adults.

By establishing an open and inviting atmosphere for youth, trans and nonbinary adults will also see the 4-H program as a place where they feel welcome and wanted. Once they
recognize 4-H as a place where they, too, can experience a sense of belonging, trans and nonbinary adults will be more likely to volunteer. This will increase the number and diversity of the adult 4-H volunteers.

As faculty of the university housing the 4-H program, 4-H agents are offered, and expected to participate in, a variety of training programs and professional development opportunities annually. University leaders in the state under study mandate some of these opportunities. There is an expectation by administrators that each person will participate in various events, covering topics such as diversity and inclusion. Having gender identity or gender inclusion subject matter will familiarize everyone with how to create inclusive environments and will allow them to understand the need for such environments. The programs will also introduce faculty, staff, and volunteers to the newly adopted gender neutrality policy and guidelines and provide refresher courses and updates.

While choosing professional development courses is voluntary, new agent training and orientation are required. This would be the right place to introduce new policies and guidelines related to gender identity. Future topics will be available, and 4-H agents will be strongly encouraged to attend. Leaders will offer certifications related to diversity for those attending.

Since 1990, GLSEN\textsuperscript{R} (formerly known as the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) members have championed Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) issues in K-12 education. With 43 networks in 30 states, members of the GLSEN network believe that every student has the right to a safe, supportive, and have an LGBTQ-inclusive K-12 education. This group consists of a national network of educators, students, and local GLSEN Chapters working to make this right a reality (GLSEN, 2021). The organization's research and experiences indicate four major ways school faculty and staff can develop safe, supportive
learning environments for all. One of these ways is to develop supportive educators (GLSEN, Homepage, Our Work, Figure 1, 2021).

When educators are visibly supportive of LGBTQ students, everyone benefits…GLSEN research shows that the presence of supportive educators can have a significant positive impact on LGBTQ students’ academic achievement, as well as on their psychological well-being and long-term educational aspirations. GLSEN Professional Development aims to empower educators to act in allyship with LGBTQ students. (GLSEN, 2021, p. 1)

Leaders will offer appropriate training and professional development to continually educate and prepare all adults involved in 4-H programming utilizing resources such as GLSEN, university specialists, data from extensive research, and diverse faculty within the university.

Conclusion

As a result of having written policies, instituting annual training, and inclusive hiring practices, 4-H in the state under study will become a welcoming, inclusive, and diverse program for youth and adults. Gender will be understood as fluid, not fixed, and flexible. How gender identities differ from assigned sex will also be understood. Those identifying as transgender or nonbinary are a protected population of marginalized people. The program membership will grow and serve youth, providing a place to thrive and experience positive youth development. There is work to be done for this to happen, and I outline that work in Chapter Six: Strategies and Actions.
Chapter Six: Strategies and Actions

Much work needs to be done by administrators and faculty at the university to successfully create and adopt a gender neutrality policy in the 4-H program of the state under study. To begin with, administrators must first agree that a gender neutrality policy is needed and then be willing to take action themselves. Only then can a team be convened to begin the writing process, collaborate with national committees dedicated to diversity, equity, and belonging in 4-H programs, and review existing documents. Once the process starts, others will begin the professional development planning and assemble the specialists and experts in diversity, inclusion, and gender identity. The team will still have more work to do as the introduction of the policy, the guidelines, and the required changes begin to take root in all counties across the state.

Change agents should expect opposition. This is a controversial and sensitive subject. Various stakeholders will test the team's strength and commitment to true inclusiveness.

Strategies and Action

More than 26 years ago, John Kotter introduced his eight-step change model in Leading Change (Kotter, 1995). This eight-step process outlined in the manuscript has been helping organizations ever since. Kotter updated his plan in 2018 and published the ebook, 8 Steps to Accelerate Change in Your Organization (Kotter, 2018). I used Kotter’s most current theory to develop strategies and actions for changes needed in the 4-H program of the state under study.

Step One: Create a Sense of Urgency

To initiate change, I must first demonstrate the need and create a sense of urgency. “Building urgency is all about concentrating on a window of opportunity that is open today but may close tomorrow. Such an opportunity brings people together, aligning them around a commonality, and clarifying where energy should be directed” (Kotter, 2018, p. 10). During
interviews with leaders in the 4-H program under study, the interviewees indicated that they did not feel such a policy was necessary at this time. Instead, they supported a system of handling gender identity issues case-by-case and preferred not to have any written guidelines.

However, 100% of the agents/faculty I surveyed and interviewed stated they did not feel the program was prepared to accommodate transgender youth. They felt administrators did not provide sufficient answers, directions, or training. The 4-H and Extension administrative team of the state under study needs to see these agent responses and the situation's urgency. In addition, District and County Extension Directors who supervise, direct, and evaluate 4-H agents, also need to see the urgency of the situation.

Finally, various advocates for change, including myself, will expose 4-H agents to the research and statistics related to transgender and nonbinary youth. The goal will be to make them aware of how critical inclusive 4-H programs are to this at-risk population of underserved youth.

In 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a wide-ranging survey among high school students in 19 states and in large urban school districts. They reported the research findings in 2019 and demonstrated that nearly two percent of high school students identified as transgender, with an additional 1.5% unsure if they were transgender. Another 2.1% answered that they were unsure what the question was asking (Johns et al., 2019, p. 68). Furthermore, ”Transgender students were more likely than were cisgender students to report violence victimization, substance use, and suicide risk” (p. 70).

In 2021, Dr. Kacie Kidd and a team of pediatricians, public health researchers, and adolescent medicine specialists in Pennsylvania completed research. They found nearly 10% of youth reported being gender-diverse (para. 7). Kidd indicated the 2017 Centers for Disease Control study may have caused underreporting by asking youth only if they were transgender or
not. The Kidd research team asked the youth to report their sex assigned at birth and then their gender identity. These researchers also found differences related to mental health. "On average, teens with gender-diverse identities have higher rates of depression and thoughts of suicide compared to their peers who are cisgender or identify with the sex they were assigned at birth” (Kidd, 2021, para. 15).

The 2019 GLSEN (formerly known as the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2020) had over 16,700 participants from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories. According to the summary of findings of those students identifying as LGBTQ, they experienced the following:

- 42.5% reported feeling unsafe in school because of their gender expression;
- 45.2% avoided bathrooms in school because they felt unsafe;
- 43.7% avoided locker rooms because they felt unsafe;
- 77.6% avoided school functions because of feeling unsafe;
- 71.8% avoided extracurricular activities at school because they felt unsafe;
- 91.8% heard negative remarks about gender expression;
- 53.2% reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression frequently or often;
- 59.1% reported personally experiencing LGBTQ related discrimination. (pp. xviii – xix)

A gender-inclusive 4-H program can provide these youth with a place to feel accepted and safe. This non-formal educational program can be a safe extracurricular learning environment for all students, where they can comfortably use a bathroom and attend events and activities with their peers. This movement will require a dedicated team of people.

**Step Two: Build a Guiding Coalition**

I will work with 4-H administrators in the state under study and form an initial guiding coalition based on Kotter's (2018) second step, allowing a successful move from the As-Is to the
To-Be conceptualizations. According to Kotter, the guiding coalition “must consist of members from multiple layers of the hierarchy, represent many functions, receive information about the organization at all levels and ranks, and synthesize that information into new ways of working” (2018, p. 13). This coalition must consist of representatives from all levels and aspects of the organization, not just administrators. This group will be an "accountable, diverse group bound by opportunity, strategy, and action" (Kotter, 2018, p. 13).

Complementing Kotter's theory, Jim Collins (2015) also wrote about getting the right people on the bus and not starting at the top of the hierarchal chain (p. 13). Those inspired by their passion for doing the right thing and moving an organization forward are some of the people I want to guide my coalition. The agents who participated in interviews will be among the first individuals I will approach. All ten had personal experiences and stories that encouraged them to discuss the need for a policy aligned with my main objective, a gender neutrality policy for the 4-H program in the state under study. They were courageous, intrinsically motivated, experienced, and requested changes that would be in the youth's best interest. I need them on my bus.

Another group of people to include are the specific young people themselves. The 4-H program serves a youth population, and their input is critical to its success. In addition, the youth-adult partnership plays an essential role in developing youth leadership skills, decision-making skills, and confidence. Dr. Cathann Kress and Donald Floyd, from the National 4-H Headquarters and National 4-H Council respectively, wrote, “In 4-H, we believe that youth must have a voice in the issues that affect them and help guide organizations and the programs and initiatives that have been created on their behalf” (2007, p. iii).

I also need an administrator with experience in the agent position on the team. This
person will be middle management, someone who has the ear of decision-makers and the respect and trust of 4-H agents in the counties. This administrator will also represent the campus component of the team, while the agents in the coalition will be from various parts of the state, satisfying Kotter's requirement for geographic diversity. A second administrative representative will be from a separate state that has already successfully adopted a gender neutrality policy. This person has already demonstrated a commitment to the change initiative and can share ideas, strategies, and successes.

There are multiple laws, directives, and government acts protecting the rights of marginalized populations. The coalition will have two individuals well versed in these documents and the legal rights of 4-H members, volunteers, faculty, and staff. From the university under study, there will be a legal counsel representative and someone from the office of the Chief Diversity Officer. In addition, members of the LGBTQ+ Affinity Group, a team committed to making 4-H programs across the nation more inclusive and welcoming, will be included.

The final coalition member will be the 4-H camping director, or the equivalent, in the state under study. The 4-H camping program generally serves youth ages eight to 12 or 13. Agents traditionally separate cabins into two sides: one side for girls and one side for boys. Some have in-cabin bathrooms shared by campers, and others have bath-houses, or similar structures, where large groups shower together. A representative of these specific programs must be part of the conversation from the beginning. In addition, the team must address the parent concerns for this age group in planning the policy and the training. Redesigning the camps is necessary in creating these new visions and initiatives.
Step Three: Form a Strategic Vision and Initiatives

As a team, the guiding coalition members will work together to create the vision behind the policy, the initiatives to support the adoption and assimilation of the policy, and the policy itself. Kotter (2018) defined strategic initiatives as “targeted and coordinated activities that, if designed and executed fast enough, will make your vision a reality” (p. 16). Administrators from other states who have already created a policy indicated that pre-policy workshops for volunteers, community members, and faculty were essential starting points. In some cases, youth councils were created and presented at these workshops. Professional development is also necessary and includes all faculty within the land grant university’s Cooperative Extension Service (often referred to as Extension). Extension is the third mission of all land grant universities, and through this program, faculty members will provide non-formal education and research-based information to improve lives. While not all faculty members are 4-H agents, each must contribute to their county 4-H program in some way. Therefore, the guiding coalition members will provide all faculty with these relevant and critical training opportunities.

Some early initiatives will include gender-neutral dress codes, enrollment documents, and language, among all materials. The guiding coalition will use existing versions of these initiatives as starting points. Members will introduce the initiatives to the faculty and staff during training, and the participants will then have the opportunity to share concerns and ask questions. Faculty will then release these initiatives to volunteers and members confidently and patiently.

While the policy itself is a crucial objective, professional development is essential and can begin while the team develops the policy. To assist in accepting the vision and, eventually, the policy, the coalition members must help others see the opportunity offered to serve an at-risk,
marginalized, underserved population that already suffers from exclusion, bullying, and fear in places like schools. These efforts must demonstrate how this change can positively impact their outlook on life and quality of life. Coalition members also need to show that these actions are possible and accepted by administrators. A key to this will be the volunteer army.

**Step Four: Enlist a Volunteer Army**

When writing about the volunteer army, Kotter (2018) explained that organizational insiders could be encouraged to serve on this team voluntarily. He referred to this group as change agents, ready and able to take action on significantly essential initiatives. Kotter (2018) stressed the importance of a solid vision from the start. Then, the change leader must give those invited to participate a choice and give them permission to step forward and take action (pp. 19-21).

National 4-H has three teams dedicated to diversity, demonstrating their commitment to creating inclusive, non-discriminatory environments for youth and adults. These include the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force; the Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee; and the Diversity and Inclusion Working Team (4-H.org, n.d.). The already written purposes and objectives, and the people who are part of these existing teams, offer a great starting point for the current research team to begin their efforts to create an inclusive gender neutrality policy in the state under study.

Also on this team will be youth, 4-H agents, 4-H staff, and 4-H volunteers, convened to create the buy-in and begin the process of writing the policy. It is vital to the program's success that individuals want to be on the team. Therefore, there can be no assignments or administrative appointments. The coalition and I will invite everyone to champion the cause and contribute to the change. This can be challenging in Extension. For example, some directors require an agent
to seek approval for any governance or committee work.

Input from stakeholders, staff, and community members is critical to the eventual acceptance of the policy. A diverse group of people from various organizations, counties, cultures, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds will be addressed and invited to join the effort. Each will bring ideas and energy, but more importantly, experiences. Adults who self-identify as transgender or nonbinary are essential participants, especially if they are alumni of youth organizations about which they can share experiences.

The events coordinator, or the equivalent, from the 4-H program in the state under study is the person who makes housing arrangements, completes registration rosters, and makes assignments for youth and adult attendees. Their input is significant because they know whether there are restrictions or issues to be addressed. For example, when using housing owned by other organizations, are they open to gender-neutral housing? Similarly, camp staff from state programs will have a unique perspective on planning, supervising, and assisting with camp programs.

Coalition members will invite a small team of stakeholders from the communities served by 4-H to join the planning committee. This group will include parents, volunteers, religious leaders, and LGBTQ+ or similar organizations. Individuals will be carefully selected to be sure they are open-minded, willing to work with others, and committed to change in the best interest of all youth. In addition, religious leaders will be critical to clarifying the joint religion-based opposition to nonbinary identities expressed in the media. Then, these participants may help build strategies and take action to defray those opposed on a religious basis. Support from this sector can make a big difference when presenting to community members.
Step Five: Enable Action by Removing Barriers

To remove barriers, one must first identify them. Kotter (2018) described such barriers as inefficient processes, archaic norms, and bureaucratic management practices (pp. 22-24). One barrier that exists before youth can become involved in the 4-H program is not providing a way to see themselves reflected in program enrollment. First, enrollment will need to include more than the binary choices of male and female. Enrollment must consist of either a complete list of nonbinary or agender decisions or should be turned into an open-ended question. Either way, this will demonstrate that the program is open and accepting beyond the binary choices. Second is the inclusion of preferred pronouns on email signatures or introductions. This action alerts others to the openness and understanding the organization has of the topic. Finally, creating gender-neutral bathrooms or ensuring that others know they can use the bathroom of their choice without restrictions to the one matching their gender assigned at birth will remove another barrier.

A challenging but necessary strategy will be to identify those individuals, whether faculty, staff, or volunteers, who are not open to this change or this environment. It is unnecessary to remove them immediately. Instead, targeting them with education, professional development, conversation, and enlightenment is important. Much like Collins' (2007) analogy of teachers as viruses surrounded by antibodies, some people will remove themselves from the organization (p. 13). The administrators must be willing to invite others to leave the program if they are unwilling to accept the changes. These people represent one of the most damaging barriers to the policy's success.

Another barrier to the creation of an inclusive program, as I identified in the interviews with administrators, is the fear of loss. These losses include financial support, membership, and community respect. One step to removing such barriers is to bring in the administrators from the
states who previously had to face these fears and who have already adopted new policies. None of the state administrators I interviewed saw those fears become a reality. In addition, key stakeholders will be part of the guiding coalition and action army, and they may help reassure the participants of the support necessary to maintain membership.

Many 4-H programs have a rich history of traditions, especially camp traditions. While maintaining some of these traditions, the team will need to identify those that no longer create an overarching sense of belonging for all and find alternate ways to celebrate and make positive changes. Parents and volunteers can be barriers in this portion of the program change because they may want new generations to experience things the same as they once did. The army of supporters can help parents and volunteers see that the current youth live in a different time, and that society has changed, so the needs and wants of youth have changed as well. Even if the events are presented the way they were in the past, today’s youth will not experience them in the same way.

**Step Six: Generate Short-Term Wins**

The complete implementation of this new policy will be a long-term action. The process could take years and those members of the guiding coalition and empowering volunteer army will need to be encouraged, motivated, and celebrated often. Short-term goals and small steps towards success will be necessary to keep the momentum going. Kotter’s (2018) description of effective wins include:

1. **Relevancy in light of the opportunity being presented.**
2. **Meaningful to others.** People beyond the winner or winners care about the win, be it members of your team, another team, customers, stakeholders, etc.
3. **Unambiguous, visible, and tangible outcomes that people can replicate or adapt.** Wins have the most impact when they scale across organizations. (p. 26)

One of the first steps will be getting current administrators to acknowledge that the
existing programs are not open and inclusive. Because the program lacks a gender neutrality policy, agents have no directions on handling specific situations when they come to their attention. When agents bring these issues to the attention of administrators, they make case-by-case decisions on transgender and nonbinary youth accommodations. The win will occur when administrators understand and accept a proactive approach to developing policies and guidelines that are more inclusive and welcoming to all.

Another win will be the inclusion of open-ended gender identity questions for 4-H enrollment. In addition, registrations for events will be open-ended and allow youth to self-identify how they feel best describes who they are. 4-H program leaders and agents will not use gender to separate youth for any reason, and if necessary for housing, youth will be permitted to choose the area where they feel most comfortable.

Within the state under study, advocates and administrators will establish a youth-adult partnership team supporting LGBTQ+ youth and adult members. This team will serve in multiple capacities including as trainers or presenters in newly developed workshops and discussion groups related to creating inclusive environments. They will contribute to developing the gender neutrality policy and guidelines and help volunteers within their counties incorporate gender-neutral and inclusive language into club events.

In addition to the workshops and discussion groups provided by the youth-adult partnership team, university personnel will provide state-wide professional development opportunities related to gender neutrality and the development of gender-neutral programs and environments. Administrators, specialists, and faculty members will all contribute to the content. Other campus-based groups and departments, such as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the LGBTQ+ Presidential Advisory Committee, Human Resources, and the office in charge of
Affirmative Action compliance, will also be invited to develop presentations.

In their book, *Resonant Leadership*, authors Boyatzis and McKee (2005) discussed the importance of optimism. "Optimistic people tend to believe that good things will happen," and "People who are generally optimistic are happier, more resilient, and more productive…" (p. 165). Creating an atmosphere of optimism by sharing positive experiences can motivate team members to keep trying, keep planning, and keep believing the policy can become a reality.

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) also addressed the need for compassion, which they define as "empathy and caring in action" (p. 178). To have empathy, a person must begin with curiosity. Unfortunately, while children are inquisitive, the authors shared that, "As we age we often lose the ability to see things – and people – through a clear lens" (p. 179). By having transgender and nonbinary individuals share their painful and joyful experiences, I will spark the curiosity and willingness to see differences without judgment and to spark the empathy and action that leads to compassion. The authors defined three components of compassion, the last one being "Willingness to act on those feelings of care and empathy" (p. 179). Team members showing compassion and genuine care for everyone without restrictions will be a sign of success.

Another short-term win will be when self-identified trans and nonbinary adults step forward to volunteer as club leaders. These community clubs, like all others, will provide hands-on learning opportunities to youth ages 5-18 through project work. The gender of the leader will not inhibit or interfere with the success of the club, and youth will join because of their interest in the subject matter and other factors such as the convenience of location and schedules.

**Step Seven: Sustain Acceleration**

Because this will be a long-term process and will require commitment, it is essential not to let time drain the guiding coalition's energy. It is necessary to continue the sense of urgency.
Kotter (2018) wrote, “Press harder after the first successes. Your increasing credibility can improve systems, structures and policies. Be relentless with initiating change after change until the vision is a reality” (p. 27). I must continue to motivate and empower the coalition, the army, and the advocates to push forward and strive to reach the point when a policy is in place.

One way to push forward is to bring in current statistics and data, especially from the bi-annual GLSEN\textsuperscript{R} surveys. Over the past few years, a clear indication has emerged that the number of self-identified transgender and nonbinary youth in our school systems will continue to rise. It is essential to remind the team that these youth are not disappearing, and society must adapt and accept them.

New membership in the coalition may be necessary to sustain momentum. The new participants may be administrators from states which have recently adopted policies and can describe success stories. In addition, agents and volunteers who have made changes in their clubs, using preferred pronouns, or introducing gender-neutral language in their programs, will be appropriate additions. Bringing these successes and people to the table can supply new energy by encouraging and giving hope, which will help motivate the acceleration of the policy's finished product.

The LGBTQ+ youth-adult partnership will continue to meet and address needs in the state under study. Members will renew efforts to evaluate the university’s continuing professional development offerings and the required volunteer training modules. They will also recommend new topics or issues to cover. As time moves forward, what started as guidelines will begin to take root, and the gender neutrality policy's adoption will move closer to reality. In addition to university offerings, 4-H agents and volunteers who have successfully created open and inclusive clubs and programming will provide their workshops at volunteer conferences and
4-H administrative meetings to share their success. Finally, faculty members will conduct research, and seek findings related to barriers and accomplishments while discussing common issues to overcome.

**Step Eight: Institute Change**

For sustainable cultural changes to happen, new actions, experiences, and victories may occur over the years. Kotter (2018) stressed that to perpetuate continued progress, the guiding coalition must clearly “define and communicate the connections between those behaviors and the organization’s success” (p. 30). Eventually, there will come a time for the adoption and implementation of the 4-H gender neutrality policy in the state under study. The adoption of the policy must be a celebration to demonstrate the positive inclusiveness and sense of belonging the policy will provide for many. The completion and presentation will be successes for the program, its people, and those who serve. These actions must be communicated and shared extensively so that no county programs will be left out. It is essential to share the policies beyond just the members so that those who did not feel welcome or included will know that change has happened, and everyone is now included as part of the 4-H community. Too often, 4-H is accused of marketing to itself, communicating only within its walls, and preaching to its choir (citation withheld for confidentiality, personal communication, November 4, 2021). Continuous professional development will be necessary to keep faculty aware and knowledgeable. Volunteer training will also be ongoing and vital to put all components into practice.

As a result of the training, ongoing partnerships, and professional development, there will be evidence across the campus of preferred pronouns in all forms of written and verbal communication. In addition, bathroom use and housing accommodations will no longer make transgender and nonbinary members feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. These will no longer be
decided on a case-by-case basis but will instead be covered in policy and guideline documents, clearly outlining how to properly, respectfully, and appropriately create inclusive housing plans.

The coalition will continue to tell the story and remind everyone why the organization must remain committed to access, equity, and belonging. Reviewing and revising the initial policy will be continuous to ensure it best serves its initial purpose. Communicating the vision, the mission, and the objectives of the overall 4-H program will remind everyone why this policy is beneficial.

**Assessing the Effectiveness of the Strategies and Actions**

An efficient assessment plan will be necessary to determine success, a comprehensive one that addresses each of Kotter’s eight steps and the objectives of the change initiative. The plan must be related to the organization’s mission, vision, and goals and should include tactics to communicate the strategies, necessary actions, and their resulting effectiveness. The evaluation tool must focus on the actions of the organization’s members but must also include the community members and stakeholders.

Creating a sense of urgency will be evidenced by the administrators’ readiness to move forward and create a coalition and a vision for a gender neutrality policy. Initially, there will be recognition of a gap in the inclusiveness caused by not having guidelines and policies to address the specific issues related to gender identity. The combination of administrators from multiple levels of hierarchy and the 4-H agents will be ready and focused on working together to create the change that demonstrates an open and accepting program for all youth.

The coalition will consist of a diverse group of people from within and outside the organization. They will hold each other and the organization accountable and take advantage of opportunities to meet and talk with stakeholders to formulate appropriate and effective strategies
and actions. The coalition will demonstrate respect for the diversity of opinions and ideas shared across the hierarchy levels, but they will remain dedicated to the vision and initiatives.

Kotter (2018) described a solid strategic vision as one that is “communicable, desirable, creates a verbal picture, flexible, feasible, imaginable, and simple” (p. 16). While not easy to recognize, stakeholders will use these traits to assess the plan continually. It will be easy to understand, especially for the youth served by the program, and it will also be realistic for them. Administrators and agents will communicate the vision to stakeholders at all levels, from legislators and lobbyists to volunteers and parents. Common, nondiscriminatory language will connect the purpose, needs, and procedures. The 4-H agents in county programming will have a clear, concise understanding of what the initiatives and strategies look like when initiated consistently and adequately.

The army of individuals who come together to form a purposeful team will need to do so by choice. In his writing, Kotter (2018) stressed the importance of giving people a choice to participate, void of any pressure or enticement (p. 21). They must be present and perform because of their passion for the purpose. They must feel the sincerity of the permission to step up outside of traditional bureaucracy and act in a way that will change the organization. For the team to succeed, a sense of safety, free from any repercussions or sanctions, must exist. Members of the army will feel welcome and safe to share opinions and ideas without having this affect their role in the organization, and they are free to leave the team at any time without consequences. All will feel equal and important, encouraged to contribute, regardless of their position in the university or 4-H program.

Every individual on the team will have safely identified barriers, especially those created by high-level bureaucracy. They will have overcome the nay-sayers who rely on doing things the
traditional ways and who avoid change. There will be no overwhelming loss of financial support from stakeholders; if some do leave, others will come in to support the new inclusiveness. Over time, team members will have met with and helped various stakeholder groups and community organizations understand the importance and the necessity for change. Included will be an educational component made up of laws, directives, and policies governing federally funded educational programs. People will demonstrate their understanding and acceptance by incorporating preferred pronouns into everyday communications, removing binary gender choices on enrollments and registrations, and regularly using inclusive language. An example of this was when Disney parks adopted a policy of removing the terms ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, as a way of addressing guests, choosing more the more inclusive term, dreamers of all ages (Artavia, 2021).

As part of a land-grant university committed to research and education, all 4-H programs must set measurable objectives and quantifiable outcomes. As Kotter (2018) explained in Step Six, Short Term Wins, coalition members must provide a “body of data that tells the story of your transformation invalidated, quantifiable, and qualifiable terms” (p. 25). Annual reports used for evaluations and stakeholder presentations will include objectives and outcomes measuring changes such as documents using inclusive language, the number of faculty and volunteers attending gender identity-related training, and youth surveys on feelings of safety and belonging. Interviews with community members, youth members, and adult volunteers can also ascertain quantifiable data and validate the changes occurring in clubs and county programs. End-of-the-year evaluations will determine whether faculty are demonstrating an understanding and commitment to creating gender-neutral programs and integrating the policy changes in their county.
To sustain acceleration, in Step Seven of Kotter’s eight-step process, members of both the coalition and volunteer army must see the short-term wins and recognize that the 4-H organization is strong and able to handle the changes (Kotter, 2018, p. 27). In the 4-H strategic plan for 2025, jointly produced by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), National 4-H Council, and the Cooperative Extension Service, these collaborative partners wrote:

4-H Grows: A Promise to America’s Kids:

In 2025, 4-H will reflect the population demographics, vulnerable populations, diverse needs and social conditions of the country. This vision has the elements of inclusion, caring adults, serving at minimum 1 in 5 youth, and the volunteers and staff reflect the diversity of the population. (USDA et al., 2017, p. 2)

I will use evidence that program numbers reflect the demographics indicated in this promise, and the increasing number of diverse, caring adults volunteering, to assess whether the program is a success.

Finally, when the gender neutrality policy is in place and the guidelines are part of the standard operating procedures, the 4-H program in the state under study will have reached Step Eight, becoming the institution of change. Kotter (2018) described the results of this step as having “new systems and processes that allow your organization to work with speed, agility, and innovation, and contribute directly to strategically important business results” (p. 30).

Sustainable change will occur when the established policies and procedures are part of the onboarding process for new agents and new volunteers. Youth and adults of all genders, and those choosing to be agender, will see themselves as welcome and included, reflected in the enrollment forms, language, and membership of the 4-H program.
Conclusion

Transgender and nonbinary populations are growing, or at least stepping up and self-identifying in increasing numbers. Researchers have recently indicated that youth recognize gender as a continuum and a choice not always aligned with their sex assigned at birth. The 4-H program in the state under study does not have policies, procedures, or guidelines that address the unique needs of these youth. Kotter's eight-step change theory will serve as a foundation for creating a robust and lengthy plan to begin writing, implementing, and adopting these three necessities.

In her change management theory, *Radical Change, The Quiet Way*, author Debra E. Meyerson (2011) reflected on the hundreds of diverse professionals with whom she has worked. They all "work quietly to challenge prevailing wisdom and gently provoke their organizational cultures to adapt" (p. 60). Meyerson referred to these "…change agents as tempered radicals because they work to effect significant changes in moderate ways" (p. 60). Tempered radicals are what the guiding coalition members and the volunteer army need to be, challenging and steadfast, but without making noise or creating a scene. Doing so will only result in massive controversy, with religion, politics, and personal rights debated, and no solution found. Adding one’s preferred pronouns to their email signature is an example of what Meyerson calls disruptive self-expression (p. 62). It is a simple act that team members know is the right thing to do but "is the most inconspicuous way to initiate change" (Meyerson, 2011, p. 62).
Chapter Seven: Implications and Policy Recommendations

State 4-H administrators in the state under study, with input and assistance from 4-H agents, will formulate and adopt a policy of gender neutrality. This policy will set the practices for recognition and inclusion of all genders and non-gendered youth in place. In addition to written policies, program leaders will provide professional development, training, and guidance to faculty, staff, and volunteers related to practices for inclusion. By doing so, the 4-H program in the state under study will create a sense of belonging, safety, and an inclusive, positive youth development environment for all youth.

Policy Statement

This policy will be rooted in the Program Leaders Working Group document, *Practices for Inclusion of Individuals of All Genders and Sexual Orientations* (2020), and the University of California’s 2017 document, *4-H Practices for Inclusion of All Gender Identities, Gender Expressions, Sexual Orientations, and Sexes: Frequently Asked Questions*. These documents address the issue of sexual orientation. However, my research did not include that topic, which is considered a separate issue.

The policy document will address several key topics, including, but not limited to, open-ended gender identity questions on all registrations, non-gender specific dress codes, housing/rooming policies for overnight events, bathroom usage, and pronoun usage. In addition, the policy will include legal and ethical ways to respond when other individuals question a person's gender or placement in a room.

Another issue raised in my research relates to parent/minor disagreements on gender identity. This policy will address handling a youth’s request to be called by a chosen name, preferred pronouns, and what happens when they identify with a gender different from their
parent on their enrollment. As the parent is required to complete the online enrollment, this issue must be addressed.

Administrators in the state under study may indicate that the current program is not discriminatory; it is already inclusive. Adopting a formal policy will provide faculty and staff with consistent and written answers to questions they have shown expressed. In addition, this policy will allow them to give volunteers, stakeholders, county government, and others consistent, clear messages about the inclusivity and acceptance of all gender identities in their county programs. It will also convey an encouraging, welcoming message to those non-binary, transgender, or gender-questioning individuals who may already feel afraid, alone, and unwelcome in youth programs.

In my survey and interview research, I consistently heard from 4-H agents in the state under study about what changes they wanted. They needed a formal policy (at a minimum, guidelines) to address gender issues in their county programming. Each agent indicated that they experienced administrators handling gender issues on a case-by-case basis and that the administrators would not address the topics formally in writing or to a large gathering of agents. The agents, those working directly with youth, training the volunteers who work with youth, and those responsible for the administration of their county program, clearly expressed that the lack of policy hindered their ability to do their jobs and did not allow for the creation of genuinely inclusive environments for adults and youth.

In addition, three of the four administrators from other states I interviewed successfully adopted policies like the one I am proposing. The concerns and cautions stated by administrators in the state under study are similar to those of other participating administrators, but none of the anticipated negative actions occurred. When I interviewed the administrator for the state without
an adopted policy in place, they indicated leaders were writing one. They continue to address the same concerns as the leaders in the state under study.

**Analysis of Needs**

In the following subsections, I will provide detailed breakdowns of my proposed policy in six categories of analysis: educational, economic, social, political, legal, and ethical. My goal is to provide a clear understanding of the many ways this policy will increase and improve the inclusivity, reach, and impact of the 4-H program. Additionally, I will explain why it is critical to adopt a policy that helps meet all youth's needs.

**Educational Analysis**

For 30 years, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has worked to protect the rights of LGBTQ youth. The organizational leaders have conducted extensive survey research biannually since 2001 (GLSEN, 2020). GLSEN researchers have identified “four major ways that schools can cultivate a safe and supportive environment for all of their students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression” (p. 1). One of these ways is through comprehensive policies, and the second is by developing supportive educators. Decades of extensive research support my plan to create a formal policy and provide far-reaching professional development and training.

“The 4-H Thriving model predicts that youth who participate in 4-H programs that provide a high-quality developmental context will thrive, and thriving youth achieve key developmental outcomes” (Arnold, 2018, p. 2). According to Dr. Arnold’s research and science-based thriving theory, positive youth development helps youth by offering programs with a focus on youth belonging. These programs “emphasize developmental relationships with adults who are caring, challenge growth, and share power” (New York State 4-H, 2019, p. 10). Outcomes
experienced using the thriving model include academic success, healthful choices, a connection with others, and contributions to others (New York State 4-H, 2019).

From Maslow (1954) to Taub (2016), research indicates that children's positive physical and psychological development depends on caring adults (i.e., parents, teachers, organizational volunteers) meeting their needs for safety and belonging. Acceptance and creating environments where they are permitted and encouraged to express themselves void of judgment fosters a sense of belonging. However, restrictive rules and actions, such as separation by biological sex and sex-based dress codes, can hamper this development and contribute to mental and emotional distress.

**Economic Analysis**

Creating and adopting the current policy will not incur high direct costs for the state under study. However, developing and providing overall professional development, training, and integration throughout the state will require funding. A possible way to save some costs would be to provide professional development for faculty and staff and leave it to county 4-H agents to provide quality training to their volunteers.

Lerner et al. (2013) spent more than ten years researching in collaboration with Land-Grant Universities, considered the homes of all 4-H programs in America. This far-reaching, broad-scope research, often referred to by 4-H agents as *The Tufts Study*, was published in 2013. “The longitudinal study discovered that the structured out-of-school time learning, leadership experiences, and adult mentoring that young people receive through their participation in 4-H plays a vital role in helping them achieve success” (Lerner et al., 2013, p. i).

The Tufts researchers concluded that youth who participated in 4-H were less likely to engage in at-risk behaviors, contributed more to their family and community, and stated that they
were more likely to attend college.

    Our research has shown that school engagement is higher in youth with more individual and ecological assets and these high levels of school engagement predicted greater academic achievement. Across Grades 5 to 8, trajectories reflecting higher school engagement were positively associated with grades and negatively associated with delinquency, depression, and substance use. (Lerner et al., 2013, p. 4)

Attending college increases a person's income potential while healthier, low-risk behaviors create lifetime savings in health care costs. Engaging students increases learning and decreases negative, distracting behaviors that create a need for discipline and lost classroom time.

The 4-H administrators expressed a concern that adopting gender neutrality policies would result in the loss of significant stakeholder contributions. However, three of the four other state administrators I interviewed successfully adopted such policies without sustaining any major financial support losses. Despite political figures and significant stakeholders threatening to withhold financial support, none of these threats came to fruition. One interviewee shared that they gained opportunities for grants and donations on both a local and state level by establishing their policy. Another participant said they lost some individual stakeholders but gained more than they lost. The administrator for the fourth state I interviewed said they are in the process of creating policy and slowly infusing the topics into their state program but have not yet set it up. Stakeholder and financial loss are a concern in this state, but university administrators have supported and continue to allow gender identity professional development and workshops.

**Social Analysis**

    This policy will serve as an opportunity to open discussions in the community about the needs of all youth, especially those in marginalized populations. By establishing policies and
holding training programs, summits, and conversations, 4-H administrators will continue to create safe and inclusive environments for all youth, offering a clear sense of belonging. "Creating an environment of inclusion within our programs removes barriers for potential participants so that we can fulfill the land-grant mission" (McKee & Bruce, 2019, p. 3). All youth will have the opportunity to thrive on a positive trajectory, develop life skills in partnership with caring adults, and become independent. Youth need to know that others care about and accept them. They need to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to others, especially peers. An inclusive 4-H program allows youth to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group and influencing others.

According to the Essential Elements of 4-H, introduced by Dr. Cathann Kress in 2004 and now part of the National 4-H curriculum, developing a sense of independence allows young people to see themselves as active participants in the future. The National 4-H gave the definition of Independence as follows:

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. They learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers. Throughout each curriculum, youth are given opportunities to develop and reflect upon thoughts and responses to the challenges, explorations, and investigations. Youth begin to understand that they are able to act as change agents with confidence and competence as a result of their learning. (National 4-H, n.d., p. 1)

A 4-H program or club meeting is an opportunity to introduce youth to the concepts of chosen names and pronouns. It is also a safe place for caring adults to model inclusive language. For example, Tiffany Richards, a presenter representing the LGBTQ+ Presidential Advisory Committee at the University of Florida, stated in their presentation and in shared documents that
introducing one’s shared pronouns at the beginning of a meeting or class sets the tone for the inclusion of others (2021, p. 14).

Political Analysis

Gender identity is a personal decision that should be respected and accepted by others. It is different than sexuality and “fundamentally different from the sex a person is assigned at birth” (Richards, 2021, p. 13). Gender socialization of gender norms and roles begins very early when specific colors and toys are purchased based on the gender reveal. These continue through life, from expectations of what we wear, how we act, and the careers we should pursue (Richards, 2021; Cole, 2019). Gender identity is also highly politicized, especially in educational institutions (Cole, 2019, p. 1). In Scherer’s article for Time, Inc., *Battle of the Bathroom* (2016), he refers to this topic as a tremendous political battle where “both sides [need] to commit loudly and completely, to elevate the issue and to force it on the American public” (para. 5). State leaders on the legislative floor debate bathroom use; school boards defend themselves in court over bathroom and locker room use rules, and there are ongoing debates in political forums about whether federal laws prohibiting gender discrimination apply to sex assigned at birth or gender choice.

Most such arguments cite religious beliefs, safety, or fear of repercussions related to sexual misconduct, such as discussed in Scherer’s article (2016):

Yet the specter of a sexual predator abusing transgender-friendly laws continues to frame the debate. Conservatives in Houston successfully overturned a city equal-rights ordinance in 2015 with a ballot measure passed after television ads reenacted a hypothetical scene in which a faceless man barges in on a schoolgirl in a bathroom stall. (para. 18)
In the same article, Scherer refers to Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board, a court case where a student sued for discrimination based on a reversal of bathroom use policies in their school. Initially, the policy allowed students to use the bathroom they felt best matched their gender identity. The school board then reversed the policy, and students were not allowed to use restrooms aligned to their gender choice. Scherer writes, “When parents found out about the arrangement, they protested to the Gloucester County school board, filling the official record with warnings of the coming sexual predation of young women” (2016, para. 9). These fears, however, were unfounded. In their book, “You’re in the Wrong Bathroom!” Erickson-Schroth and Jacobs (2017) wrote, “In fact, as of 2015, there had been no recorded incidents of anyone trans or gender-nonconforming being arrested for sexual misconduct in a bathroom within the United States ever” (p. 76). The authors said that transgender persons are more likely to be victimized than victimizers.

Since 2013, multiple states have passed legislation making it illegal to use a bathroom not aligned with the gender on a birth certificate. The first was Arizona, then Nevada, Tennessee, Texas, and South Dakota followed by Wisconsin (Erickson-Schroth et al., 2017, p. 85). As recently as 2016, North Carolina passed House Bill 2 (H.B. 2), which came to be known as the Bathroom Bill, preventing people from using public bathrooms that correspond to their gender choice (Smith, A. E., 2016). In response, President Obama issued a letter to every school in the United States directing them to allow students to use bathrooms and locker rooms aligned with their gender choice and to use students' preferred names and pronouns. The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education co-signed the *Dear Colleague Letter* (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). The letter was a directive, not a law, but it made its way into many courtrooms.
However, the order was later formally rescinded as written in the document. The next president did this, Donald Trump; this further illustrates how highly politicized the topic has become.

It was not until 2017 that the incoming North Carolina governor struck a deal with the Senate to repeal only parts of H.B. 2. Many felt the compromise still discriminated against LGBT people. As Silva (2017) explained:

> A deal that North Carolina lawmakers reached to repeal the state's controversial and costly "bathroom bill" passed on Thursday after a contentious debate — but the compromise has left LGBTQ advocates exasperated, with some calling it "shameful" and an "outrageous betrayal." (para. 1)

As part of the compromise to remove the bathroom restrictions, what remained in place was a three-year ban on any local nondiscrimination ordinances. In other words, county governments could not enact governance protecting transgender persons from discrimination. Furthermore, state legislators remained in control of policies related to multi-stall bathrooms. The American Civil Liberties Union, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and numerous LGBTQ organizations opposed the deal because it left in place the ability for the state to discriminate against specific populations of people in need of protection (Sullivan, 2017).

Funding for 4-H programs comes from local, state, and federal government funds, making this a political issue. All three levels of government are mandated to operate nondiscriminatory organizations and abide by a vast array of policies related to the American Disabilities Act, Title IX, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and more. However, the interpretation of these policies remains politically charged. The interpretation leads to questions such as: Do policies related to sex discrimination include gender identity? Is gender set or fluid? Should laws mandate restroom usage? By establishing a specific gender neutrality policy, the 4-H program in
the state under study will remove most of the political interpretation which changes with every election.

Granted, there is a chance some politicians will come out against the proposed gender neutrality policy and threaten to withdraw support and potential funding. The program administrators I interviewed stated that this was the case for them. However, no entities withdrew funding in the three states that adopted these new policies. To be clear, it would be more litigious to allow discrimination to occur and cause the loss of federal funding, as described in more detail in the next section, Legal Analysis.

**Legal Analysis**

All 4-H programs are part of land-grant universities and, thereby, part of an educational institution. In addition, federal policies regulate the universities and 4-H programs, and receive federal government funding. For example, “Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) prohibits sex discrimination in any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). In July 2021, officials at the U.S. Department of Education issued a press release (USDOE, 2021, June 16) in which they shared their Notice of Interpretation (Goldberg, 2021). This notice specified that individuals will be protected from discrimination based on sex stereotyping in any educational program or activity, and that they will not be denied the benefits of these programs, or in any way be treated differently "because of their sexual orientation or gender identity" (Goldberg, 2021, p. 11). Furthermore, the interpretation reads, "Title IX prohibits harassment and other forms of discrimination against all students for not conforming to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity” (p. 3). Therefore, Title IX prohibits 4-H programs from any
discrimination practices, including those related to stereotyping, such as gender-specific dress codes.

This recent interpretation and explanation support the need for a gender neutrality policy within 4-H, specifically, for non-gender-specific dress code policies. As government employees in education, 4-H faculty are required to abide by Title IX and, therefore, should receive continuous professional development and training regarding the amendment. It is the legal responsibility of the employer, generally the land-grant university, to provide this training and to initiate policies that support Title IX.

State legislators have made progress in recognizing the rights and needs of transgender individuals. "Eighteen U. S. states and more than 130 cities ban discrimination based on gender identity, including employment discrimination, but no law protects trans people on a federal level" (Erickson-Schroth et al., 2017, p. 108). There are local laws; trans people still report discrimination in employment, housing, and education. Discrimination, intentional or not, leaves the 4-H program open for litigation and harsh financial penalties. More importantly, discrimination can damage a child. When a youth dares to share their non-binary gender identity with the adults in charge of the 4-H program, it can be harmful to them emotionally and mentally if their questions and needs go unanswered. Multiple court cases have concluded in favor of students using bathroom facilities in agreement with their gender identity, not the sex assigned at birth. Such cases include Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board (Hurley, 2021) and Bostock v. Clayton County (Goldberg, 2021). Mataconis (2019) referred to the Supreme Court ruling in favor of students in a case involving Philadelphia schools. Mataconis’ research indicated that “pretty much every Federal court that has ruled on this issue has sided with the transgender student” (para. 15). Denying a youth member, or adult volunteer member, the right to choose a
facility based on their chosen identity would also violate their rights and subject the program to legal charges.

According to agents interviewed in my research, housing youth during overnight events such as camping was the most pressing issue. The 4-H Program Leaders Working Group document, used by multiple state leaders in formulating their state policies, addressed this issue under Facility Considerations:

When there are gender segregated facilities and/or activities, individuals who identify as transgender or intersex must be allowed to sleep, use the restroom, shower and participate in alignment with their gender identity…. If your event has room assignments, it is a great practice to let all campers indicate who they would prefer to share a room/cabin with (LGBTQ+, 2020, p. 6).

While agents may be willing and taught to assign rooms this way, another legal issue arises when parents ask questions about the gender of their child's roommate. It is discriminatory for an individual to refuse to share accommodations with another youth who identifies as transgender (LGBTQ+ Champion Group, 2020, p. 9). The land-grant university associated with 4-H has a non-discriminatory policy based on Title IX. Additionally, national 4-H policies do not permit the disclosure of someone’s gender identity. Therefore, 4-H faculty and staff cannot discuss a specific person with anyone (LGBTQ+ Champion Group, 2020, p. 8).

In August 2021, I attended an affirmative action update training program related to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At this training, participants learned that personally identifiable information collected on sign-in sheets is protected private information and cannot be open to public observation. In other words, participants cannot sign in on a document able to be seen by any other person. The information, for example, sex, race, ethnicity,
and age, is considered private, and it is the faculty member's responsibility to protect it from public knowledge. Regarding the housing issue, it would be the faculty member's responsibility to keep the information about any participant’s gender identity and sex assigned at the birth confidential. This data would be considered personally identifiable information and should be shared only in a few situations of legitimate programmatic need. The person in charge of housing assignments is an example of someone with a legitimate need to have this information. This person can be made aware of their gender choice and asked to house them per their request. However, the housing coordinator is not permitted to share that information with others further. According to the LBTQ+ Champion Group document on inclusion practices, "A participant simply identifying as transgender does not constitute a legitimate programmatic need" (2020, p. 8). All personally identifying information should be kept in strict confidence and carefully shared only with those who have attended training related to the guidelines and who agree to abide by them.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

Erickson-Schroth and Jacobs (2017) wrote, “Referring to people by their chosen name and pronoun is a basic demonstration of respect” (p. 37). Moreover, they asserted, “Those who do their best to use our preferred names and pronouns allow us to feel respected and safe” (p. 42). Doing the right thing is always right. Despite the political environment, threats of defunding, or societal pressures, respecting others is correct, and instilling these attributes in our youth impacts our future.

When visiting the website for The Trevor Project, a crisis intervention and suicide prevention site for LGBTQ+ teens and young adults (https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/lgbtq-gender-affirming-spaces/), the first thing on the screen is a quick exit strategy and
instructions on how to erase the browser history immediately. This is because visiting a site dedicated to suicide prevention and crisis intervention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning young people is sometimes viewed as dangerous if others find out. Not all environments in which a youth may have access to the internet will be affirming or positive. According to The Trevor Project’s report, *LGBTQ & Gender-Affirming Spaces* (2020), “Affirming environments are associated with reduced suicide risk among LGBTQ youth, including those who are transgender and nonbinary” (p. 3). Providing an accepting and inclusive 4-H program informed by clear policy would be an affirming environment.

A person's identity impacts their self-esteem and self-worth. Having that identity questioned causes a person to ask who they are and how they are valued, affecting their choices, interactions with others, and mental well-being. Over multiple years (2016, 2018), participants in the GLSEN surveys have demonstrated that transgender youth felt unsafe in schools and earned lower grade point averages. They were also less likely than their cisgender peers to consider higher education. By avoiding school functions (75.4%) and extracurricular activities (70.5%), these students were not socializing, networking, performing, or learning as much as their cisgender peers (GLSEN, 2018). While educators work to improve the school setting, 4-H programs with gender-neutral policies and practices will allow youth to experience these beneficial practices.

For members of an organization to repeatedly claim that they are representing an equal opportunity institution without committing to an inclusion policy is unethical. To fulfill the mission and purposes related to these words, an organization must have a set policy that provides guidance, support, and education to the agents. Members committing to continuous professional development related to gender neutrality ensure that actions and policies will be carried out over
time. This also demonstrates a commitment to the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of all youths by providing them a place to feel affirmed, safe, and accepted. That is the moral and ethical thing to do.

**Implications for Staff and Community Relationships**

My policy will provide clear direction for staff and faculty on topics related to gender identity and related practices such as pronoun use, housing, camping accommodations, and creating a sense of belonging. By having a state policy, faculty will feel more confident and supported in their decisions. A statewide policy may also impact the number of people applying for positions within the 4-H program. Those adults identifying as non-binary, transgender, or gender-fluid may see this policy as an indication of open acceptance for themselves. As the 4-H program relies heavily on trained volunteers, the spectrum of applicants may grow considerably.

Due to this policy, granted, there will be some loss. Those who cannot accept such a policy will leave their positions and the program rather than support such actions. However, those people would not be creating open and inclusive environments for all youth, and the 4-H programs should accept such losses as a positive occurrence for the organization. It is better to have a vacancy than a non-affirming, non-inclusive adult providing guidance and direction to the youth.

The interview data I collected from administrators across four states indicated the community would support such a policy. Three of the states have such policies in place, and these policies have allowed for open discussions, workshops, forums, and educational programs in the community. Feedback shows people are willing to listen and learn. Youth councils are an essential factor and can strengthen policy because they are designed, in part, by the youth they serve. In my research, the authors noted that the youth were never the ones expressing fear,
concern, or discomfort with non-binary or transgender identities, parents, and other adults (McElligott, 2019). In my experience, youth are open and accepting of their peers who share a chosen name or gender identity different than the one assigned at their birth.

By initiating this new policy, leaders will create safe and inclusive places for youth to be and discover themselves. There will be affirming spaces for those youth who are marginalized or feel suicidal, to develop a sense of belonging instead. The community will be a better place as youth and adults' mental well-being increases. The future of these youth, the strength of the community, and the respectability of the 4-H program in the state under study will all be positively impacted by the adoption of this policy.

Conclusion

Adopting a policy related to gender neutrality in the 4-H program will strengthen the program, provide clear direction to faculty and staff, and demonstrate an open, inclusive, and accessible program for all youth. Agents in the state under study will have answers to common questions, and those answers will be consistent. Youth and adults in the community will recognize acceptance, and at-risk youth will have a safe place to be themselves. This policy affirms the equal opportunity institution statement, compliance with Title IX of the Education Act, and all federal guidelines on nondiscrimination. As a result, this will be the appropriate action for the 4-H program.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Poet Audre Lorde is credited with saying, “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences” (Juma, 2019, quote #4). I conducted a study to evaluate the environment of one state’s 4-H program regarding the topic of gender identity and to determine whether a gender neutrality policy would be beneficial to youth. I wanted to know if this policy would assist agents and administrators in recognizing, accepting, and celebrating the differences of transgender and nonbinary youth members. My findings indicate a wide gap between what administrators see happening in the program and what the agents who work in the county programs experience. My research findings support the need for a state-wide gender neutrality policy in the 4-H program under study. I hope administrators will recognize the importance of creating a more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming environment by adopting a gender neutrality policy for their 4-H program.

Discussion

My objective in conducting this research was to determine whether the 4-H program under study would benefit youth and accurately be called inclusive by adopting a gender neutrality policy. I interviewed 4-H administrators in the state under study and four additional states. In addition, I conducted surveys with some 4-H agents in the state under study and conducted follow-up interviews with those volunteering to participate beyond the survey. In combination with extensive research and literature reviews, my findings indicate a need for a gender neutrality policy with operational guidelines and professional development for faculty, staff, and volunteers.

When interviewing administrators from the state under study, my goal was to establish their current stance on having a gender neutrality policy, whether they believed the current
program to be inclusive without a policy, and what prevented them from having a policy at this time. I used prior information about concerns and issues related to having state-wide 4-H gender neutrality policies to formulate the questions for administrators in other states. While I did not know the current policies of these states, three of the four responding already had gender neutrality policies adopted, and the fourth was in the process of putting one forward. All indicated they had the same concerns and fears as those administrators in the state under study, but they moved forward regardless. None of them reported a significant loss of donors or financial support. They did not experience significant disruption in their volunteer program or adult membership. Several noted that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted youth membership, and therefore it would be wrong to assume that membership had been affected by the policy. However, there is no indication within the county programs that youth are disturbed by such a policy, nor are they concerned about the overall topic of gender identity.

The surveys and interviews conducted with 4-H agents in the state under study revealed the most surprising data. The agents who worked in the counties and directly with the 4-H youth and volunteers expressed very different opinions from administrators in the same state. They consistently expressed a need for a policy related to gender identity. They also indicated that related issues and questions brought to administration resulted in either delayed or no answers. Several stated that the delays were so long that the youth's family either changed their mind or the event passed without an explanation. Their consensus was that administrators were not proactive and wanted to address each situation individually rather than writing any decisions or creating a state-wide policy to address the issue. Those interviewed agents unanimously agreed that a written, state-wide policy was needed and wanted and would serve the purpose of creating a more open, inclusive, and welcoming program for a more diverse audience.
The overwhelming agent support for a gender neutrality policy adds to the sense of urgency for adopting such a policy. The questions asked by the agents, especially those they say have gone unanswered, are addressed in the proposed policy statement. To create an effective policy, a team of supporters, agents, volunteers, and administrators will work together to outline, brainstorm, write, and adopt the policy that changes the culture of the 4-H program in the state under study. Agents repeatedly stated the administrators were reactive, not proactive. Adopting a 4-H gender neutrality policy for the state 4-H program changes this reactive position. In addition, it demonstrates a bold commitment to upholding its vision to create positive change for all youth, all families, and all communities (citation withheld for anonymity).

Along with the policy, professional development programs provided will help agents and administrators understand the content of the policy, addressing and teaching topics such as gender-neutral dress codes, inclusive language, and equitable and inclusive overnight accommodation plans for all. Agents and administrators will celebrate small steps as changes become incorporated into the state program, influencing changes in the county programs. Representatives from the state under study will also be networking with other state administrators who have either already adopted or are in the process of adopting gender neutrality policies for their 4-H programs. Collaborative efforts and national consistency will strengthen all efforts as they send a unified message of unrestrictive inclusivity.

**Leadership Lessons**

Psychologist and change management coach Mark Connelly wrote, “In reality, fear is one of the most common reasons for resistance to change because it stops you taking any action at all” (2009, para. 1). Experts have written many books on change management, change leadership, and sustainable change. Change is inevitable but not easy. It is tolerable without
effort, commitment, and data to support the need and direction. Change is most important, and I have accepted this as part of my leadership development.

Throughout this journey, I have learned the importance of creating a team, formulating a plan, listening to others, and taking small steps to initiate change. One person attempting this quickly and alone leads to resistance and failure. In studying Kotter, Collins, and other change leaders, I realized that I had to find data to support the changes I wanted to see made in the 4-H program. I had to find like-minded people to join in the efforts, and I had to define how the change would positively impact the greater good. While exploring several different change leadership plans, I chose Kotter’s 8-step process as the primary change management plan. This made sense as each step was defined and detailed. In his e-book version, published in 2018, Kotter described what results would look like if carried out correctly. This method appeared logical for my thinking and learning, and the results were attainable. I will continue using this process in my career whenever I find the need for some type of change in the program.

I have learned a great deal about those who identify as nonbinary, transgender, and agender. More importantly, I have come to understand more about the challenges and fears they face daily just to go to school or the bathroom. The terms inclusive, equitable, and fair are more apparent to me, and I realize few places genuinely embrace these terms without exceptions. My research and the journey to collect it opened my eyes to the often-hidden politics and personal agendas. These agendas are also known to hinder the growth and development of inclusive programs. I sincerely hope to put the findings and research to good use in educating Extension and 4-H administrators and other faculty members.

From this education and enlightenment, my goal is to be part of a team that successfully composes, introduces and adopts a gender neutrality policy for the 4-H program in the state
under study. My findings, especially the interviews with 4-H faculty members working with youth in the various counties, support the need for such a policy. The extensive literature review I conducted was highly informative and eye-opening. The research supports the need for more gender-neutral policies and educational guidelines to create more inclusive environments for students. The review also demonstrates an increasing population of transgender, agender, and nonbinary youth.

Patience and perseverance are two life skills I have positively developed over these past three years. Both are necessary to achieve short- and long-term goals, and neither can be rushed or bypassed to be successful. These are critical in my personal and professional life, as everything we want to accomplish must be carefully carried out step by step. I must follow the process to have a sound, sustainable outcome. Giving up cannot be an option for leaders.

Conclusion

When a program’s mission and vision statements include inclusive, belonging, and equitable words, one should expect the program to be open and welcoming to all. Gender neutrality policies and the adoption of values such as inclusive language and non-gender specific dress codes let others know the program is a place for all people, including nonbinary individuals, to experience the basic human needs of safety and belonging. As the researcher, Miller described by using a powerful, anonymous quote, “When you are born in a world you don’t fit in, it’s because you were born to create a new one” (2019, p. 1). However, it is not just those who feel different who are needed to make a difference.

As 2021 came to an end, the editors of Dictionary.com chose the word of the year and chose one unrelated to the pandemic. They chose the word allyship. Dictionary.com defines it as:

The status or role of a person who advocates and actively works for the inclusion of a
marginalized or politicized group in all areas of society, not as a member of that group but in solidarity with its struggle and point of view and under its leadership. (2021, para. 3)

In writing about allyship and its selection for 2021, journalist Sheena Foster (2021) explained that it represents various recent efforts to ally with individuals different from yourself. She included societal changes related to racial justice, critical race theory, the #metoo movement, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and making workplaces more transgender/nonbinary friendly.

Together, we all need to make the changes that allow everyone to find their place and experience a sense of belonging. You may be the one who does not fit in and who wants to be the difference-maker. You may be the ally who knows the right thing to do is to stand with and for others despite not completely understanding what it is like to live their lives. The strength and numbers come from solidarity and, as the editors of Dictionary.com reported in their word of the year announcement, “allyship can be understood as an ongoing journey, not a final destination” (2021, para. 23).
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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questions for 4-H agents
Appendix B: Interview Questions for 4-H Agents
Appendix C: Interview Questions for Administrators in the State Under Study
Appendix D: Interview Questions Administrators for Other States
Appendix E: “As Is” 4 Cs Analysis
Appendix F: “To Be” 4 Cs Analysis
Appendix G: Strategies and Actions Chart
Appendix A

Survey Questions for 4-H agents

*NOTE: For all questions, the term TRANSGENDER refers to any person who identifies as other than their sex assigned at birth (SAB).

For questions 1-10, please answer each question using a scale of 1-4, with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree.

1= Strongly Disagree  2= Disagree  3= Agree  4= Strongly Agree

Questions 1 – 5: The 4-H program in my county…

1. has enrolled members who identified as transgender.
2. has discouraged enrollment of youth who identified as transgender.
3. has NOT been able to accommodate the needs of transgender members.
4. has DENIED accommodations for the needs of transgender members.
5. has adapted enrollment forms to include more than two traditional gender choices.

Questions 6 – 10: In our county camping and overnight event program…

6. we have had transgender counselors at camp.
7. we have had transgender campers at camp.
8. we have had transgender members go to an overnight event.
9. we have had transgender teenagers participate in residential summer programs.
10. we have discouraged or denied transgender youth from participating in overnight programs.

Please provide written responses to questions 11 – 14.

11. If you answered Agree or Strongly Agree to Question 3, please explain what accommodations were needed or requested and why you were not able to meet them.

12. If you answered Agree or Strongly Agree to Question 4, please explain what accommodations were needed or requested and why they were denied.
13. In your opinion, is the 4-H program prepared to meet the needs and requested accommodations for transgender youth in your county programs? Why or why not?

14. Would you be willing to be interviewed by the researcher to discuss transgender youth and the 4-H program in your county?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add, or something you feel would be important to the topic, that I have not asked?
Appendix B

*Semi-structured Interview Questions for 4-H Agents*

1. In what way has your program been impacted by a transgender youth?

2. Do you as an agent feel you met the needs of this child? Please explain why.

3. Did you as an agent need clarification or assistance with any 4-H rules or regulations because of this person’s participation? Please explain.

4. If you asked for help or clarification, whom did you ask, and did you receive the information or guidance you needed?

5. As an agent, do you feel the 4-H program is open to transgender youth? Why or why not?

6. As an agent, do you know if the 4-H program has guiding principles for meeting the needs of transgender youth?

7. Do you feel 4-H should or should not have a statewide Gender Neutrality Policy for 4-H agents to follow? Please explain.

8. Is there anything else you feel the 4-H administration should know about working with transgender youth?
Appendix C

Semi-structured Interview Questions for Administrators in the State Under Study

1. Is the 4-H program a diverse, open, and inclusive program for all youth ages 5-18? Please explain.

2. Does 4-H have any written policies that address the issue of Gender Neutrality? If yes, to what policy(ies) are you referring?

3. Have you, as an administrator, been approached by county faculty concerning issues related to transgender youth who may or may not have been 4-H members? Please describe the issues.

4. Have you provided answers to any faculty concerning lodging issues for transgender members at an overnight 4-H event? Please elaborate.

5. Have you felt unable to provide accommodations for transgender members or youth during any 4-H event or activity? Please elaborate.

6. Do you, as an administrator, have any current plans to initiate a Gender Neutrality Policy for the 4-H program? Why or why not?

7. Do you, as an administrator, have any current plans to adapt the state 4-H online enrollment program to include more than two traditional gender choices? Why or why not?

8. Is there anything else related to the topic of Gender Neutrality in the 4-H program you feel would be important to this research and report? Please be detailed.
Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Questions for Administrators for Other States

My general research questions will focus on three stages of programming:

1) Before:
   What barriers did you encounter to creating fully inclusive programming?
   Did you encounter resistance from administrators, stakeholders, membership, and the
   community at large? If so, what type?
   Who were the ones who offered the most support for this policy?
   1a) Secondary questions for follow up:
       How did you overcome those barriers?
       Did you ever feel you or your job were threatened if you pursued this issue?

2) During:
   What did your early attempts at policy look like?
   Did you pilot your ideas in any area or go straight to state policy?
   Was there resistance and, if so, from where did it come?
   Did you lose or gain any significant number of members while initiating?
   2a) Secondary questions:
       Were youth stepping forward and identifying as transgender, gender neutral, or
       nonbinary as you worked towards establishing policies?
       In your experiences, did you observe or hear of any youth being mistreated,
       bullied, harassed, or otherwise negatively treated in relation to the issues?

3) After:
What is the current situation relating to this policy?

How do your membership numbers compare to pre-policy?

Did you lose or gain any major financial supporters as a result?

3a) Secondary questions:

If you were starting over with the implementation of this policy, what, if anything, would you do differently?

In your experiences, has this policy improved, hurt, or not affected your 4-H program?

Is your 4-H program better suited to meet the ideology of 4-H, provide Positive Youth Development, as a result of the process and the policy?

4) Is there anything else related to the topic of Gender Neutrality in a 4-H program you feel would be important to this research and report? Please be detailed
Appendix E

“As Is” 4 Cs Analysis

Context
- A sense of belonging is essential for positive youth development

Culture
- Taboo topic never directly addressed by administration
- Do it your way times the number of counties; we will stop you when people complain
- Top down administration
- Lack of trust at the state level and a good ‘ol boy network

While the number of youths identifying different than gender assigned at birth increases, no policy, no training, no discussion of gender neutrality in the 4-H program of the state under study

Conditions
- Federal, state, district, & county rules that limit autonomy
- Overloaded agents responsible for entire program
- 100+ yr old program with a large homeschool base that have religious conflicts with these topics
- Increased emphasis on volunteer development and less time spent with youth

Competencies
- Increase in younger agents more familiar with topic
- Ability of agents to take advantage of professional development outside of 4-H
- Agents are educated faculty members
- Non-discriminatory laws/policies do exist and can be used as a foundation to encourage policy development

A sense of belonging is essential for positive youth development
Appendix F

To-Be 4 Cs Analysis

Context
A sense of belonging is essential for positive youth development

Culture
*Every person is accepted for who they present themselves to be without question
*Facilities such as bathrooms are neutral and open to all
*Youth and adults are permitted to register for overnight events as the gender they feel best describes who they are
*Faculty and staff feel supported and safe in demonstrating open and inclusive programs

Conditions
*All program materials contain inclusive language
*There are no programmatic restrictions or need for special accommodations
*Stakeholders, volunteers, and community members support and participate 4-H programs without hesitation
*Membership grows annually as a result of being inclusive
*The use of gender neutral language is normal and accepted by all

Competencies
- New agents are familiar with policies and guidelines related to inclusivity and gender neutrality
- Professional development related to creating open and welcoming environments, including understanding the needs of marginalized populations, is offered at least annually
- Agents are educated faculty members
- Gender neutrality is part of the non-discriminatory statements and are a protected population

The 4-H program in the state under study is open and welcoming to all youth and holds in high regard their written Gender-neutrality policy and guidelines.
Appendix G

Strategy and Action Chart

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| Create a sense of urgency.  | Meet with 4-H administrators in the state under study, District and County Extension Directors and local 4-H agents to share information to raise awareness of critical need to address LGBTQ+ youth:  
  - CDC report for 2018 indicates 2% of HS youth identify as transgender and 35% of them attempted suicide in 2018  
  - Kidd et al. report 2021 -10% of high school students in Pennsylvania study  
  - 70-75% of LGBTQ+ youth avoid extracurricular school activities and school due functions to feeling unsafe or uncomfortable  
  - More than 42% avoid using the bathroom at school out of fear for their safety  
  - 100% of the agents/faculty surveyed stated the state program did not supply answers, directions, and training and they did not feel the program was prepared to accommodate transgender youth  
  - A sense of belonging, identified as a critical need by Maslow in 1943 just above breathing, food, and water, remains vital to physical, mental, and emotional well-being of children today |
| Build a guiding coalition   | The guiding coalition will work specifically with faculty and staff overseeing events like camp, leadership retreats, and youth overnight events to create policies, guidelines, and solutions to the issues of housing and facility use. My guiding coalition will include:  
  - A 4-H leader for the state under study  
  - Members of the LGBTQ+ Affinity Group who speak from experience and success around the country  
  - Legal counsel from the university in the state under study  
  - Surveyed agents who expressed a need for guidance based on experiences in their county program  
  - The camping program director in the state under study |
| Form a strategic vision and initiatives | All members of the guiding coalition will contribute to writing a comprehensive vision and mission statement pertaining to creating a gender-neutral program:  
  - The state administrators will adopt gender-neutral language, dress codes, and enrollment documents  
  - The state administrators will provide comprehensive professional development, in-service trainings, and guidance for agents in creating a gender-neutral program  
  - A comprehensive document of Guiding Principles will be written and distributed by state administration demonstrating a commitment to change  
  - Where necessary, gender-neutral policies will be written by state administration and adopted for the state-wide program |
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| Enlist a volunteer army     | As the majority of 4-H programming is done by volunteers, members of the guiding coalition will create volunteer training modules related to creating open and inclusive clubs and creating a sense of belonging for all youth specific to gender-neutrality. The volunteer army will include:  
  • Volunteer leaders from a variety of small, large, rural, and urban county programs  
  • Camp staff from states where guidelines or policies are already in place  
  • Events coordinator for the 4-H program in the state under study  
  • Adult alumni identifying as transgender or non-binary recruited by their former 4-H agents |
| Enable actions by removing barriers | • Written guidelines and policies from state administration will be provided for agents.  
  • Remove traditional two-answer gender questions will be the first action to remove a barrier and demonstrate inclusion  
  • Create gender-neutral bathrooms or allowing youth to choose a bathroom based on gender identity  
  • Establish the use of pronouns on email signatures, online sign-ins, and in verbal introductions of yourself; gathering pronoun choice when collecting identity data from members  
  • Create a camp housing policy recognizing transgender youth as part of our membership |
| Generate short-term wins     | • Open-ended gender identity questions on enrollment and registration forms state-wide  
  • State-wide professional development workshops related to gender-neutrality being offered will demonstrate a commitment to developing gender neutral programming and preparing agents to create gender neutral environments  
  • Administration in the state under study acknowledge they have not yet been open to transgender members and are ready to listen and make changes  
  • Establishment of a state youth-adult partnership team in support of LGBTQ+ youth and adult members  
  • LGBTQ+ volunteers step up and are welcome to start community clubs |
| Sustain acceleration        | • The LBGTQ+ partnership will continue to meet and make recommendations to the state 4-H administrators  
  • Professional development related to gender-neutrality will increase and include non-4-H faculty  
  • Guidelines will begin to morph into policies  
  • Volunteer training will consistently and continually include gender-neutrality  
  • 4-H in the state under study will join the list of states with clear and concise policies and be an example to states not yet making the decision to become gender neutral  
  • 4-H professionals will offer workshops and trainings nationally to share their research, steps to success, barriers, and common issues they had to overcome  
  • Volunteers versed in transgender and non-binary needs will offer workshops |
for other volunteers in state and district conferences

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| Institute change | • The 4-H program in the state under study will have clearly written guidelines and policies related to gender-neutrality in the program  
• The administration, agents, volunteers, and members will actively promote and practice inclusion, equity, and accessibility for all  
• Transgender members of the 4-H program will have proper, appropriate, and defined accommodations at all programming across all levels  
Faculty across all colleges and campuses of the university associated with the 4-H program in the state under study will understand and accept the benefit of pronoun declaration as creating a safe environment |