

## New Head of UA 4-H Aims to Grow Program Beyond Its Agricultural Roots

UA Cooperative Extension  
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**Jeremy Elliott-Engel** <sup>[1]</sup> says the "spark" that ignited him in his youth carried him through life, and ultimately culminated in a leadership position with 4-H, one of the largest youth organizations in the country.

Elliott-Engel, who once was a 4-H member in rural upstate New York, is now the new associate director for 4-H youth development at UA **Cooperative Extension** <sup>[2]</sup>. He began in September.

"My spark was around farm animals. I was intrigued by livestock from a very young age. When I was 12, I went to my first 4-H meeting," Elliott-Engel said.

Though his family did not work in the agricultural industry, he grew up in an agricultural community and found a niche in 4-H.

"I did livestock projects, but I also learned about leadership and did community service, learned about government. It really started my career as an educator, because it allowed me to put on clinics around my interest. That spark grew into something. And then I never really left it."

Prior to joining the UA, Elliott-Engel was a regional 4-H youth development specialist with the University of Missouri, and recently completed a doctorate in agricultural, leadership and community education at Virginia Tech. His dissertation focused on extension and 4-H administration.

"There's a lot of literature around 'youth spark' and having young people identify the thing that they're interested in, and helping facilitate that interest," Elliott-Engel said. "When the 4-H model is conducted with high context and high content, it is very powerful in helping young people build efficacy around their spark. We want to help young people find that spark, and help them develop mastery."

The 4-H program is implemented by the nation's land-grant colleges and universities through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension System. In Arizona, UA Cooperative Extension has 100,000 participants annually, across clubs, events and other activities, with some youths participating in more than one.

Under the model, youth identify interests and participate in clubs, or do projects focused on their interests, whether they are in the traditional animal raising curriculum, or in other areas, including STEM. Developing students' skills in science, technology, math and engineering has become a focus for the organization in recent years.

Elliott-Engel said one of the aims of 4-H is to take the science of the University and translate it to youth.

"Four-H youth are more likely to go to college than non-4-H peers," he said. "That has to do with the fact they participate in an organization that is connected to a university. Four-H does things that help raise awareness of college – especially in those populations where college may not be top of mind – in urban settings as well as rural communities. We also do things to bring young people to campus."

Elliott-Engel said he hopes to take Arizona 4-H beyond agriculture, the industry that has been part of the organization's identity since it began at the beginning of the 20th century with a motto of "head, heart, hands and health."

"The current zeitgeist is that 4-H is centered on agriculture. And that's certainly the organization's roots and a current strength. But that doesn't mean that that is all 4-H is. We want to help translate research happening at the UA to a youth audience," he said.

Elliott-Engel said he looks forward to leading Arizona 4-H and engaging units across campus.

"We want to be the youth development program that people from across the UA campus turn to when they think about doing youth outreach," he said. "When other departments want to do youth work, we hope they would think about 4-H as their delivery mode."

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**Source URL:** <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/new-head-ua-4-h-aims-grow-program-beyond-its-agricultural-roots>

### Links

[1] <https://extension.arizona.edu/person/jeremy-elliott-engel> [2] <https://extension.arizona.edu/>