

Targeting Youth Development:

A Collaborative Approach to Volunteerism in 4-H Shooting Sports

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NEEDS/GOALS

South Carolina 4-H Shooting Sports (4-H SS) depends on trained volunteers to ensure safety while intentionally fostering positive youth development (PYD). Strong developmental relationships with caring adults and belonging with peers leads to confidence, caring, connection, character, and competence in youth (Lerner et al., 2005), helping them be ready for work and ready for life. The goal of this collaborative model is to increase volunteer capacity, strengthen youth-adult ratios, and create a statewide culture of safety and propelling youth to be *Beyond Ready* through strategic partnerships with the Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SC DNR).

APPROACH

The primary role of most trained South Carolina 4-H SS volunteers is to serve as a coach, mentor, and trainer by working directly with youth. Trainings directly target the importance of PYD principles (displayed in graphic below), and screenings and certification ensure the safety and protection of adults working with youth. South Carolina 4-H SS program collaborates with SCTP and SC DNR to:

- Increase efficiency of volunteer recruitment and training;
- Create a consistent statewide culture of safety and PYD; and
- Broaden event accessibility for youth across the state.

Coaches working with youth are required to undergo multiple layers of training and screening in SC 4-H SS.



RESULTS



Figure 1. Enrollment of 4-H members and adult volunteers in 4HOnline associated with Shooting Sports and respective average of youth-to-adult ratios before (Pre-Collab) and after (Post-Collab) organizations joined.

Retention

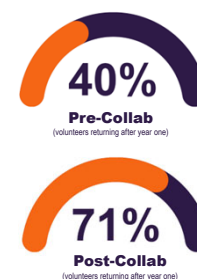


Figure 2. The retention of adult South Carolina 4-H Shooting Sports volunteers (n = 301) after their first year.

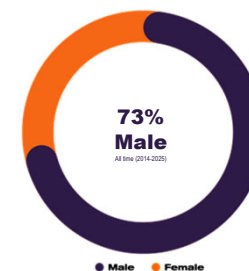


Figure 3. The sex of most adult South Carolina 4-H Shooting Sports volunteers (n = 301) is male.

Table 1. Number of adult volunteers receiving Level I instructor certification in shotgun discipline by SC 4-H Shooting Sports (SS) and collaborators [Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) and SC Department of Natural Resources (SC DNR)] over time.

Club Year	4-H SS	SCTP	SC DNR	Annual Total
2018-2019	85	.	.	85
2019-2020	0	27	.	27
2020-2021	42	21	.	63
2021-2022	45	11	19	75
2022-2023	32	22	23	77
2023-2024	49	30	15	94
2024-2025	8	16	9	33
SUBTOTAL	261	127	66	454



“Shotgun coaching isn’t about hitting every target; it’s about planting seeds in as many minds as possible and trusting that the right ones will take root.”

*Charlie Davis, Volunteer Coach
SC Governor’s School for Agriculture at John de la Howe*

“My reason for becoming a 4-H leader and coach was...to provide the best life lessons and skills in hopes of building future leaders of the world in a positive manner.”

*Paula Mills, Volunteer Coach
Newberry Eagles Shotgun Team*

Figure 4. South Carolina 4-H Shooting Sports volunteer with SC DNR in action and representative quotes of other volunteer motivations.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

South Carolina 4-H SS benefits from collaborative relationships with SCTP and SC DNR demonstrated by improved coach retention rates by 31% and youth-to-adult ratios (10.6 vs. 6.1) following the collaboration. In addition, the number of Level 1 certifications increased from 2021 to 2024 over previous years. South Carolina 4-H Shooting Sports, supported by a dedicated network of over 100 volunteers, exemplifies the power of volunteer-driven programming in Extension. Through strategic partnerships with SCTP and SC DNR, the program efficiently shares resources, prioritizes safety, and fosters life skill development in nearly 500 youth participants annually. Volunteers, many of whom are parents, serve as the bridge between competition and character-building, ensuring that South Carolina youth are not only skilled shooters, but also confident, capable, and community-minded individuals. This collaborative certification and training model provides a scalable framework that other Extension systems and youth programs can adopt to strengthen volunteer-led programming and youth mentoring capacity.



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences

