

2025 Excellence in 4-H Volunteerism Award
Escambia County 4-H Volunteer Support
Abstract



While experiencing exceptional growth, the Escambia County 4-H program targeted three objectives necessary for developing sustainable growth that is supported by volunteers. These objectives included: (a) developing volunteer competence through trainings and conferences, (b) establishing a consistent communication plan, (c) and generating financial resources. Participation in six or more hours of training increased by 20%, a total of 308 hours were committed to trainings, with a generated financial backing of \$4,750. Through a strategic and intentional communication plan, leaders felt more connected to the 4-H office and county program. Implementation required the collaboration of numerous entities including the 4-H professionals, volunteers, Foundation members, and community partner organizations. Through these efforts, volunteers developed critical skills and knowledge that has led to new opportunities and development of connections and resources which were previously absent.

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Escambia County 4-H Volunteer Support Narrative



Needs Assessment

The Escambia County 4-H program has experienced exceptional growth over the past few years, growing from 282 enrolled 4-H youth to 714 participating with 17 clubs in 2024. With such growth, it was critical to reevaluate and update our volunteer support efforts. During this time, the program has grown from 67 volunteers to 150 in 2024, which represents a 225% increase. While exciting, this growth has highlighted the need for a strategic approach to county wide program volunteer development to ensure consistent opportunities for growth and competency development of our volunteers. Multiple self-report surveys, informal meetings with volunteers, and feedback the 4-H advisory committee indicated (a) more opportunities for volunteer development, (b) a need for more consistent communication from the 4-H office with 4-H leaders, (c) more financial guidance and support for development opportunities due to volunteer financial constraints.

Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal of these efforts was to increase program capacity through the intentional development of volunteers. To do this, the following objectives were identified:

1. Develop volunteer skills and competence through intentional and continued in-county and beyond the county development trainings and conferences.
2. Establish a communication plan to ensure all leaders feel connected to the 4-H office.
3. Collaborate with partners to generate and organize the financial resources to alleviate the financial burden of pursuing development opportunities.

Methods

To meet achieve these objectives and goals we implemented the following strategies:

1. We planned and delivered quarterly in-county leader and volunteer development opportunities that were held in-person (2) and virtually (2) that focused on facilitating experiential learning opportunities in the club setting and managing club financial resources and logistics. Volunteers walked away from these trainings with not only the knowledge of how to implement the knowledge learned, but also with the tools needed such as first-aid kits, spot-it cards, curriculum, decks of cards, and other tools.
2. Monthly volunteer and parent update meetings were held in conjunction with the county-wide youth leadership meeting, during the time youth were participating in other activities. During this time, leaders and parents had the opportunity to ask questions and get early information on upcoming events and activities.
3. Promoted and encouraged attendance of volunteer conferences with financial backing from the 4-H program. Volunteers were requested to share a topic or skill learned during their experiences during the trainings and meetings throughout the year.
4. Each 4-H professional in the county office identified 4-H leaders and volunteers to connect with each month to ensure consistent communication between the county 4-H office and the club. These selections were decided based on programmatic areas, specializations, and/or personal relationships. Throughout the year, 4-H professionals contacted club leaders, visited clubs, answered questions, and “checked-in” monthly to

establish and build trust.

5. The 4-H team adopted multiple modes of communication including the use of 4Honline broadcast emails, the development and use of the 4-H Now App for mobile devices, the use of a county program Facebook page, and the use of a volunteer and leader specific listserv. These efforts directly addressed one of the primary needs that was first identified.
6. The 4-H team worked with the Escambia 4-H Foundation, the Florida 4-H Foundation, and various programmatic partnerships to generate financial backing to provide scholarships for volunteers intending to attend beyond the county conferences and trainings.

Outcomes and Impacts

Over the course of time that these efforts have been implemented, there has been an increase of 20% of volunteers participating in six hours or more of positive youth development training from only 57% to 77% in 2024. Group learning participants also increased in this timespan, rising from 4,298 group learning participants in 2017 to 13,914 in 2024, which is a 324% increase. These efforts have not only led to document knowledge gain and behavior change as noted by observational checklists but has also led to volunteers reporting increased confidence in their knowledge and skills.

- “I used the activities that I learned there in my first meeting back. It made a big difference in the kid’s engagement in the meeting.”
- “I understand so much more about 4-H when we meet with other club leaders at Council meetings.”

The 4-H team made more than 216 planned check-in calls with leaders, with even more informal calls made between events and fielding questions as needed. Approximately 70 emails, were sent through both listserv and broadcast options to volunteers throughout the year. The team also developed a volunteer Google site and volunteer notebook to organize and house critical 4-H documents, paperwork, curriculum, and other various resources.

- “I like when the 4-H office reaches out to me.”
- “It keeps all the important things in one place, and that is really helpful.”

During 2024 alone, 56 volunteers participated in 71 hours of in-county development training, and 32 volunteers participated in 237 hours of out-of-county conferences and training. The Escambia County 4-H program partnered with the 4-H foundation and other community partners to provide \$4,750 of financial support of both local and out-of-county opportunities.

- “I started a new 4-H Jr. Master Gardener club because I was able to have some gardening training paid for by the (4-H) Foundation.”
- “When I was able to go to Rock Eagle [VCOSS], I learned so many new things to bring back to my 4-H club.”

A survey was implemented in 2024 to determine volunteer satisfaction. Results showed that volunteers felt challenged and engaged, received timely information from the 4-H office, and felt appreciated by the 4-H staff. Results also showed that improvement was needed to provide all of the tools and resources necessary to lead their 4-H clubs and that volunteers did not connect

much with non-4-H Extension staff. Based on this feedback and successes of our overall strategy, the 4-H team intends to continue improving and implementing these methods to continue to positively educate, appreciate, and communicate to 4-H volunteers.

According to Schmiesing and Safrit (2005), “the success of the 4-H Youth Development program is largely the result of the strength of its volunteer corps.” A full-time equivalent (FTE) for a faculty member would equate to 2,080 hours of contributed time. For the Escambia 4-H program, volunteers contributed a total of 4,845 hours, for an economic impact of approximately 2.32 FTE. Meaning program volunteers provided opportunities for youth roughly worth the full time equivalent of approximately two paid full-time faculty members. While the capacity that is developed by the engagement of volunteers, the quality provided by competent and caring volunteers is second to none. Escambia County 4-H volunteers develop and lead programs that are responsible for creating a sense of belonging, teaching mastery, instilling independence, and encouraging generosity. These components are not only essential to an effective youth development program, but also make for the recipe of a 4-H family.

Collaboration

The implementation of this program volunteer strategy required numerous collaborations. The 4-H professionals responsible for the county program, shared responsibility, leading the implementation of different methods. The professionals also worked with the 4-H Foundation to establish a budget and travel policy that would aid in eliminating the financial constraints faced by eager volunteers. Furthermore, the professionals worked with various program partners to generate funding to seek specific program trainings. Most importantly, the 4-H team collaborated with leaders and volunteers to develop and revise methods that would address identified needs. In developing the objectives to meet the identified needs, volunteers were directly engaged in each step from participating in training to reporting on conference experiences to share the cascading impacts to our partners. The success of this approach is solely due to the buy-in and the commitment to collaboration of our volunteers.



Escambia County 4-H Google Site

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Supplemental Materials

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General, military, and project specific volunteer trainings for Escambia County 4-H volunteers



Jenny Jordan (Natl. 4-H Military Partnership) presenting a leadership training to Escambia County 4-H volunteers



Escambia County 4-H youth presenting club reports at a 4-H County Council meeting



Escambia County 4-H volunteers before they depart for the 4-H Volunteer Conference of Southern States



Escambia County 4-H volunteers at the 2025 NW District 4-H Volunteer Forum

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Supplemental Materials

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UF/IFAS Extension
Escambia County



3730 Stefani Road
Cantonment, FL 32533
850-475-5230

2024-2025 Escambia County 4-H: Overnight Competition Policy

Escambia County 4-H is committed to sending youth and volunteers to regional and statewide 4-H competitions to instill life skills in youth. Travel and overnight accommodations are often necessary given our geographic position in the state.

Escambia County 4-H will provide the following financial resources for 4-H teams that attend regional and statewide 4-H competitions:

- \$100 each for two 4-H leaders/volunteers (who have been approved in 4-H online) who lead the event. One leader/volunteer must be fingerprinted/background screened.
 - Per night spent in accommodations
- \$75 for each youth that physically attended the 4-H event
 - Per night spent in accommodations

All accommodations for longer than one night must be approved at least 1 week prior to the event.

All monies will be reimbursed after the 4-H event. Hotel receipts are required for reimbursement. Room sharing and price comparisons of hotels are encouraged. All attendees must follow all 4-H policies and procedures.

Escambia County 4-H Overnight Competition Policy for the 2024/2025 4-H year.

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2024-2025 Escambia County 4-H: 4-H Volunteer Travel Policy

Escambia County 4-H is committed to sending volunteers to statewide, regional and national 4-H conferences to learn information to instill life skills in youth. Travel and overnight accommodations are often necessary given our geographic position in the state.

Escambia County 4-H will provide the following financial resources for approved 4-H volunteers to attend recognized 4-H conferences:

- Full Registration for volunteers of the conference
- \$100 each for volunteers (who have been approved in 4-H online) who attend for lodging
 - Per night spent in accommodations

All accommodations for longer than one night must be approved at least 1 week prior to the event.

All monies will be reimbursed after the 4-H event. Hotel receipts are required for reimbursement. Room sharing and price comparisons of hotels are encouraged. All attendees must follow all 4-H policies and procedures.

Escambia County 4-H Volunteer travel policy for the 2024/2025 4-H year.