

School-Based 4-H Programming Series: Designing Programs Based on Time Involvement¹

Vanessa Spero²

When starting a school-based 4-H program, important factors to consider are the amount of time and level of commitment that can be provided for the 4-H program at that site. This document discusses the degree of commitment, intensity, and positive youth development (PYD) impact of the program. The most PYD-intensive program will include a model for sustainability. Sustainable programs will ultimately survive and thrive without continual supervision and daily maintenance.

Before a program can be designed, it is important to do an assessment. Discussing the needs of the program with the 4-H Association/Advisory Committee as well as the Expansion and Review Committee will assist in ultimately defining the goal for a county program. A needs assessment or Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis may be necessary to determine the best fit for a program. For more information, refer to Spero (2019), *School Based 4-H Programming Series: Working with Partners Effectively*.

Once you have completed that assessment, consider the following three additional factors. For more guidance refer to Spero-Swingle & Munyan (2018), *School-Based 4-H Programming: Getting Started*.

- **Goal:** What is the ultimate purpose of the program? Is it to develop a sustainable, long-term program? Is it to increase the number of youth who participate in the 4-H

program? Program design will look different based on these goals.

- **Time:** How much time can be devoted to developing a program? Realistically look at the schedule for the coming 4-H year. Determine the amount of time that can be committed to a program. Is it a commitment that can continue all year long or a shorter-term commitment such as six weeks or a few months? These will help solidify how much time to spend on developing the program.
- **Resources:** What is available in terms of materials, staff, funding, and other resources for the program? Is there a grant, program assistant, volunteer, or current partnership to assist? These will help shape the program.

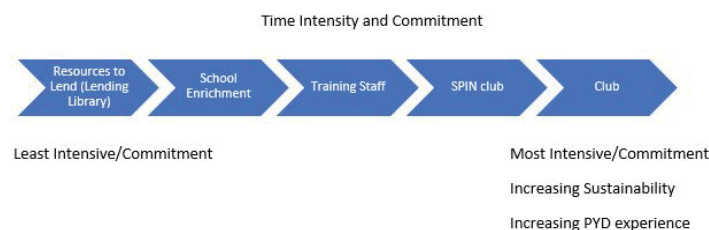


Figure 1. Illustration of the time intensity, commitment, and PYD experience when implementing the 4-H program.

1. This document is 4HSFS101.20, one of a series of the 4-H Youth Development Program, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date September 2019. Revised November 2022. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.

2. Vanessa Spero, regional specialized Extension agent II, Florida 4-H Youth Development Program, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Resources to Lend (Lending Library)

A lending library requires the least level of commitment and is the least intensive way to expand a 4-H program. UF/IFAS Extension offices should have curricula available in various programs, and these can be checked out by volunteers. A process for lending materials (check-out sheet, time duration, follow-up procedure, etc.) should be in place ahead of time.

Beyond lending curriculum, materials in the form of ready-made “kits” can be tailored for a longer program at a site. These can be theme based; for example, a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) kit with a focus on robotics will include an approved robotics curriculum (check the curriculum clearinghouse) and the necessary materials to complete a project, such as robotics equipment and worksheets.

To support a lending library, one can seek funding through grants, income-generating revenue, or donations. With a lending library, determine if the materials require any training for the person to utilize the curriculum and/or materials for a kit, if any consumable materials will have to be replaced for a kit, what the best inventory system will be for curriculum and kits, and how to advertise that these materials are available. Determine a method to track youth who participate, whether that be a standard group enrollment form for the appropriate number of hours youth utilize the materials or another system that will help capture participation.

School Enrichment (refer to Tesdall, 2012, 4-H School Enrichment: A Guide for 4-H Faculty and Staff, at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4h324>)

School enrichment programs focus on a commitment of six hours in programming for youth. Two of the most popular school enrichment programs are 4-H/Tropicana Public Speaking and 4-H Embryology. The list of possible school enrichment programs is not exhaustive, and a county can use a lending library kit with six hours of programming materials to overlap as school enrichment. Citizen Science programs are another avenue to consider for school enrichment programs. The time invested varies greatly in these programs. For more information on these programs, refer to the resources below:

- Florida 4-H Public Speaking program powered by FPL (<https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/youth/school-enrichment-programs/public-speaking-school-enrichment/>). This program focuses on teaching and enhancing public speaking skills. The program and contest are supported by FPL and 4-H. Time commitment and intensity will depend on whether a site is familiar with the program or a first-time participant. New sites may require more training on using the materials and may need more help to teach public speaking and secure judges. Often the biggest time investment is advertising the program, registering sites, sending out materials, and planning the county contest. The cost is minimal because most of the materials accessible online.
- 4-H Embryology (<http://florida4h.org/embryology/>, and Boston, DeCubellis, & Levings [2015] <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4h367>). There are a multitude of considerations when implementing embryology that will determine the time commitment and investment. Embryology programs will look different in different counties. Considerations include whether teachers/staff will be trained to use the supplies or whether the agent will set up the incubators and troubleshoot for the site. Will the Extension office provide eggs and secure homes for the chicks once they are hatched? Will the agent go to the site and teach lessons or only provide curriculum? Who is responsible for the upkeep of the incubators? These are a few considerations when designing an embryology program that will ultimately dictate how much time an agent will spend on the program.

Training Staff

Training staff will help identify new potential volunteers to start a 4-H club or program. Training on youth development and 4-H curriculum could be done annually or as a series of trainings. Training can last anywhere from a few hours to a full day. Trained staff will learn of the available resources 4-H can offer and may ask for more training on youth development in the future. Training can be offered on teacher in-service days, on the weekends, or in the evenings. Partners, such as Parks and Recreation sites, benefit greatly from training, especially those that run afterschool programs looking for ideas to educate youth.

SPIN Club (<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/4hspin/>)

SPIN stands for **S**pecial **I**nterest. In a 4-H SPIN Club, five or more youth learn about a topic of interest, known as a 4-H Project. Topics can include interests such as gardening,

rocketry, cooking, photography, and more. Project clubs are led by volunteers who have a passion for a topic and working with youth and who want to share their knowledge and skills.

Each club meets six or more times for at least one hour per session. Meeting dates are set based on availability of potential participants. The meeting location is selected for the type of activity and number of participants. For more detailed information on SPIN clubs, refer to the above website.

SPIN clubs are an opportunity to engage youth with the possibility of turning their short-term club experience into a long-term club experience once they are attracted to the program. SPIN clubs also allow cultivation of volunteers because they utilize adults in the community with a skill to share. They give the opportunity to build on more intensive project work and develop further positive youth development skills. Multiple SPIN clubs offered at one site can also help grow a long-term program.

Club

A school-based 4-H club requires the biggest commitment and is the most time intensive to achieve. The impact will become greater and more rewarding as the positive youth development experience intensifies.

In order to start a club at a school-based site, consider what can be provided and what the site wants. Refer to Spero (2019), *School-Based 4-H Programming Series: Working with Partners Effectively*. Once that is determined, set the club up with all the essential elements for success by addressing how to incorporate them into the club setting. For more information refer to Spero (2019), *School-Based 4-H Programming Series: Setting School-Based 4-H Clubs Up for Success*. Fostering and encouraging as many of these practices as possible is important to secure sustainability in youth participation.

When thinking about sustainability, acknowledging the role volunteers will play in a club and recognizing the differences from traditional volunteer engagement are important. Training, resources, and availability are just three examples of the differences to consider when utilizing traditional volunteers versus utilizing site staff/employees as club leaders.

Training site staff/employees to be 4-H volunteers can take different formats and should be tailored to the needs and

availability of partners. Below are some examples of different formats:

- **Off-site training:** Training for staff/employees can take a traditional format if they are able to come to the county-wide volunteer trainings. These may be workshops, lectures, or webinars on youth development and volunteer guidelines. A county can also offer training on professional development days in order to introduce the core components new volunteers will need.
- **On-site training:** Once the partnership is formed and a site agrees to start a club it is important to determine when the staff is available for training. School-based sites often work evening hours, which are the most popular times for volunteer trainings. When this happens, the best route is to train at the site. The 4-H agent should plan to have the staff/employee shadow them the first year at the site. The 4-H agent would need to plan to attend all the meetings for the first year to be successful. Utilizing technology to host meetings and webinars will also help to implement the practices 4-H follows in youth adult partnerships. Lessons with clear instructions and materials can be left at the site if they plan to have more than one meeting a month.
- **Hybrid training:** Depending on time availability, it may be possible to train new volunteers in school-based settings utilizing off-site and on-site training methods.

Upon designing a program, develop a plan for sustainability with the site, and preferably a two- to five-year plan to allow for growth for the new volunteers taking on responsibility. The first year may be a very hands-on, high-intensity time commitment. As the site staff become more familiar with the practices and policies of 4-H, a plan should allow tapering of direct support.

A school-based 4-H club will also require more time when they plan to participate in county activities. This may mean the agent has to plan for and accommodate that club with more tailored opportunities. More information can be found in Spero (2019), *School-Based 4-H Programming Series: Setting School-Based 4-H Clubs Up for Success*.

Ultimately the success and sustainability of a club may be directly correlated to the commitment the agent makes in setting it up and providing support where needed. School-based 4-H clubs are rewarding in that they offer participation opportunities for youth that otherwise may not have access to 4-H programs. For more successful tips in implementation, refer to the School-Based 4-H Programming series of documents.

In conclusion, 4-H offers many opportunities to engage youth at school-based sites. There are multiple steps that can be implemented to allow for success and lead to sustainability. Not all program-development models will work for all sites but understanding the differences can help keep everyone involved happy and benefit youth to the best of everyone's ability.

References

Boston, M., DeCubellis, C., and Levings, J. (2015). *Getting Started in the 4-H Embryology Project: Tips for 4-H Agents and Teachers*. 4H367. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Retrieved from <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4h367>

4-H embryology program. (2010). Retrieved from <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/4-h-embryology/>

4-H/Tropicana Public Speaking Program. (2017). Retrieved from <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/youth/school-enrichment-programs/public-speaking-school-enrichment/>

Spero, V. (2019). *School-Based 4-H Programming: Working With Partners Effectively*. 4HSFS101.16. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Retrieved from <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4h399>

Spero, V., and Munyan, S. (2018). *School-Based 4-H Programming: Getting Started*. 4HSFS101.15. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Retrieved from <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4h389>

Spin Clubs. (n.d.). University of Illinois Extension. <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/4hspin/>

Sustaining youth development efforts. (2019). http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/sustainability.cfm

Tesdall, T. (2012). *4-H School Enrichment: A Guide for 4-H Faculty and Staff*. 4H324. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4h324>