February 2026 | 4HSFS101.2

SCHOOL-BASED 4-H PROGRAMMING SERIES[1]

Designing Programs Based on Time Involvement

Written By: Vanessa Spero[2]

When starting a school-based 4-H program, crucial 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. The goal is for programs to be as sustainable as possible so they will survive and thrive without continual supervision and daily maintenance.

Before a program is designed, it is important to do an assessment. Discussing the needs of the program with stakeholders, such as a 4-H Advisory Committee, will assist in 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* or Kime (2023), *Conducing a SWOT Analysis*.

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? Look at the schedule for the coming 4-H year and determine the amount of time that can be realistically 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? Time is limited, so thinking about this commitment ahead of time will make the program more successful and less stressful.
- **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? The development of the program will be based on the available resources.



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

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. 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 Toelle, Andrew. 2023. "4-H School Enrichment: A Guide for 4-H Faculty and Staff: 4H324, Rev. 2 2023". *EDIS* 2023 (1). Gainesville, FL. https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-4H324-2023.

School enrichment programs may focus on a commitment of a certain number of hours in programming for youth. Some of the most popular school enrichment programs are Public Speaking, Embryology, and Health Rocks!®. The list of school enrichment programs is not exhaustive, and a county can use a lending library kit with a set number of hours of programming materials to overlap as school enrichment. Clover by 4-H is another option to introduce curriculum for educators to utilize. The time invested varies greatly in these programs. For more information on these programs, refer to the resources below:

- Public Speaking: Florida 4-H Public Speaking program powered by Florida Power and Light (FPL) (Public Speaking School Enrichment - Florida 4-H - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences - UF/IFAS). This program focuses on teaching and enhancing public speaking skills. The program and contest are supported by FPL and 4-H in Florida. 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 since most of the materials are accessible online.
- 4-H Embryology (Embryology Project - Florida 4-H - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences - UF/IFAS, and Boston, DeCubellis, & Levings [2018] 4H367/4H367: Getting Started in the 4-H Embryology Project: Tips for 4-H Agents and Teachers). There are a multitude of considerations when implementing embryology that will determine the time commitment and investment. 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 purchase and 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.
- Health Rocks!® (Health Rocks!® - National 4-H Council). This program focuses on empowering responsible decision making and maintaining substance-free lifestyles by engaging positive youth/adult relationships. Health Rocks!® is led by trained facilitators so the initial commitment requires training 4-H staff members or volunteers. Other time considerations include recruiting and training teen teachers to assist in programing, advertising the program, and securing sites. Once these factors are in place, plan for 8–10 on-site sessions to run the program.
- Clover by 4-H (https://4-h.org/clover/about/): Clover by 4-H provides opportunities for educators to pull lessons on a variety of topics, for youth ages 5–18. Materials and resources vary for lessons, but most are cost effective and require few materials.

Training Staff

Conducting staff trainings with target audiences, such as teachers, classroom assistants, parents, etc., 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. Sessions 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, weekends, or evenings. While not a school-based

site, partners who run afterschool programs, such as those at county and city community centers, parks and recreation, etc., also benefit from training. Planning and offering training to a wider audience can maximize your efforts with minimal extra time commitment. Connecting with local Afterschool Networks will help to create training opportunities.

SPIN Club

4-H SPIN Clubs | Virginia Cooperative Extension | Virginia Tech

SPIN stands for **Sp**ecial **In**terest. 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.

SPIN clubs are an engaging way to offer short-term programs when time is limited for any of the parties involved. 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.

This short-term club experience is often more manageable and an easier buy-in for teachers, volunteers, participants, families, and 4-H staff. This valuable opportunity can serve as a stand-alone experience or a gateway to other 4-H programs. Additionally, 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.

Although the actual SPIN club does not require a long time commitment, other preliminary factors must be considered. These include training and screening volunteers, securing sites, and registering participants.

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 for success by addressing how to incorporate positive youth development principles into the club setting. For more information refer to *What Is PYD? The Science of Success* by National 4-H Council. Fostering and encouraging as many of these practices as possible is important to secure sustainability in youth participation and achieve positive outcomes.

When thinking about sustainability, acknowledging the role site staff as 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 training courses. These may be workshops, lectures, or webinars on youth development and volunteer guidelines. A county can also offer training on professional development days to introduce the core components new volunteers will need.
- **On-site training:** On-site training is sometimes a better option to accommodate the site's employees and the new 4-H program or partnership. 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. 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. Utilizing technology to host meetings and webinars will also help to implement the practices 4-H follows in youth adult partnerships.

Upon designing a program, develop a plan for sustainability with the site, and preferably a two- to five-year plan to allow for program growth and increased volunteer 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 Toelle (2023), *4-H School Enrichment: A Guide for 4-H Faculty and Staff.*

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

4-H embryology program. (2010). Retrieved from https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/youth/school-enrichment-programs/embryology-project/

Boston, M., DeCubellis, C., and Levings, J. (2018). *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://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4h367

Florida 4-H Public Speaking Program. (2021). Retrieved from https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/youth/school-enrichment-programs/public-speaking-school-enrichment/

National 4-H Council. "Health Rocks!®." *4-H.* Accessed October 19, 2025. https://4-h.org/programs/healthy-living/health-rocks/

National 4-H Council. "What Is PYD? The Science of Success." *4-H*. Accessed September 23, 2025. https://4-h.org/about/what-is-pyd/

Kime, L. 2023. "Conducting a SWOT Analysis." Accessed November 18, 2025. https://extension.psu.edu/conducting-a-swot-analysis.

Spero, V. 2019. "School-Based 4-H Programming: Working With Partners Effectively: 4HSFS101.16 4H399, 6 2019". *EDIS* 2019 (3). Gainesville, FL. https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-4h399-2019

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://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4H389

Toelle, A. 2023. "4-H School Enrichment: A Guide for 4-H Faculty and Staff: 4H324, Rev. 2 2023". *EDIS* 2023 (1). Gainesville, FL. https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-4H324-2023

[1] This document is 4HSFS101.2, one of a series of the 4-H Youth Development Program, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date September 2019. Revised November 2022 and November 2025. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/ for the currently supported version of this publication.

[2] Vanessa Spero, regional specialized Extension agent III, Florida 4-H Youth Development Program, UF/IFAS Extension, Cocoa, FL; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

An Equal Opportunity Institution. 4-H is the nation's largest youth development organization. Over 230,000 members in the State of Florida help to make up the community of more than 6.5 million young people across America. 4-H is a non-formal, practical educational program for youth. Florida 4-H is the youth development program of Florida Cooperative Extension, a part of the University of Florida/IFAS.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information, and other services only to individuals and institutions that operate in compliance with applicable federal and state non-discrimination laws and policies. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A&M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, Dean for UF/IFAS Extension.