

The Significance of Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Workshops for Volunteer Leaders and County Programs



The time commitment required for a volunteer leader training workshop is significant. Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. materials are carefully controlled and are made available only to workshop graduates. This workshop system is justified in order to continue delivering a cohesive, effective, and safe Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program.

With a strong workshop-based foundation, the program has been an outstanding recruiting opportunity and an excellent tool for delivering youth development and conservation messages. In addition, it has exposed young people to other 4-H programs. To maximize the chances of recruiting new members to 4-H, leaders must be well prepared, highly motivated, and interested when they are interacting with young people.

Following are common questions and answers about the program.

Is the Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program a traditional 4-H program?

Yes and no. The 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program is both traditional and innovative.

It is traditional in that it includes all the core elements of a 4-H program: a youth development base, safety education, skills development, interaction with positive adult role models, and career exploration. The hands-on teaching methods are traditional, and the leader development model, once a major innovation, has become traditional in the delivery of other programs.

The team-teaching approach, the relatively flexible format for delivery, and the audiences are relatively nontraditional.

The program is traditional where it counts. Its non-traditional components may lead the way for innovations and impacts in the 4-H program across the nation.



S.A.F.E.T.Y.

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How much of the county agent's time is required to develop and maintain the program?

The amount of time county staff must commit to the program varies with organizational style, willingness to develop volunteer management systems, and personal interests. Initial development of the program may require a minimum of 40 to 80 hours over the course of the year, including attendance at a workshop. Some agents have spent only 15 to 20 hours getting the program started effectively. Maintenance time also varies. It could require just 8 to 12 hours per year giving advice and consent to a volunteer committee and handling normal communications with leaders, committees, state staff, and young people.

Some agents choose to maintain a higher profile and a deeper involvement. Others limit their involvement to the amount of time needed for visibility, program understanding, and personal satisfaction. It is very important for agents to maintain that visibility and program understanding.

How much time is expected from a volunteer?

The time commitment for volunteers varies dramatically. Many 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. volunteers are deeply committed to the program's objectives; however, a great challenge for them is managing their time in order to avoid burnout. Burnout can result in a high turnover rate among volunteers.

A comprehensive, basic program can easily involve 50 to 80 hours annually of direct youth contact in instruction alone. Involvement with practice sessions, matches, fundraising, and planning activities can multiply that time commitment.

Participants in the state events are required to have completed 8 hours of 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. training per discipline and have participated in at least two club, county, or multicounty matches (events) before the state event.

Having a large leader corps ensures a high leader-to-youth ratio. A large number of leaders also increases the potential for youth-adult mentoring, development of other relationships, and multiple approaches to program elements, thereby reducing burnout.

The program requires the constant recruitment of volunteers by meaningful involvement of newly recruited leaders. Like the training model, this shared leadership model holds great promise for 4-H use in today's environment. You will want leaders to establish limits to their time commitment rather than trying to get more time from them. Accordingly, use a large team of volunteers to deliver small segments of the total program, allowing small individual time commitments.

Why can't I simply use any existing hunter education or National Rifle Association (NRA) instructors certified by other agencies or organizations to conduct a program?

Existing hunter education instructors, NRA-certified instructors or coaches, certified archery instructors, or similar individuals are excellent resources for starting the program. For them, the primary function of the workshop is orientation to the scope, intent, and methods of working within the 4-H program. Without that background, the programs that emerge are often renamed repetitions of existing programs available through those other organizations. The distinctive orientation, approach, and methods of the Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program make it uniquely 4-H. Without those elements and guidelines for program management and support, the program risks its integrity and effectiveness, as well as its value as a 4-H recruitment tool. Workshop content helps leaders deliver an effective, high-quality, and self-sustaining youth development program using the shooting sports as a vehicle. The workshops seek to ensure quality control and program consistency.

Do the 4-H techniques differ significantly from those used in other programs?

The proven techniques used in the Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program are compatible with existing programs other organizations offer. They differ in being pointedly based on youth development objectives and in addressing shooting sports, rather than as a set of disconnected individual disciplines. **Young people and adult leaders are 4-H products.** 4-H techniques yield high success rates with both personal development and outdoor skills.

What concepts are covered in a 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. workshop?

The workshops are a "mini" version of the national program workshops. The core centers on safety and responsibility, teaching skills, coaching principles, 4-H objectives and organization, sources of support, and means of linking 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. to other 4-H programs. A set of basic disciplines (archery, muzzleloading, pistol, rifle, and shotgun) extends from the core. Every leader receives the core materials, and each is trained in a specialized discipline. Only one discipline may be taken at any given workshop because of the time requirements and the content load that must be communicated. It is essential that a leader cover the basic elements before going on to advanced activities. The current workshop format includes instructional experiences, videos and presentations, lectures, and hands-on instruction.

We strongly encourage a dynamic team approach to teaching and program management. Each instructor receives more training (18 hours plus) than required for certification by the official certification organization in his or her discipline. Because inexperienced people can become effective instructors through the program, prior knowledge of the shooting sports is not necessary. Enhanced skills, including marksmanship, frequently result from the training; teaching the instructor how to shoot better is a bonus and a demonstration of how well the techniques work.

Why are leaders certified through state-level workshops?

State-level workshops provide a way of ensuring quality of leadership, preparation of leaders, and efficient use of the volunteers who make up the county team. This team, in turn, trains the young people in its county. It is also another way to involve volunteers at a higher level and allow the agent to provide program oversight. Additionally, legal concerns require leaders to be certified in this manner.

Who conducts the training?

Volunteers or agents with national training in their disciplines provide the instruction. State instructors attend a national workshop and commit to training volunteers for 3 years. Almost all the instructors are also certified by other organizations or agencies, and the provided instruction surpasses the requirements for instructor certification by those organizations and agencies.

Why send a team of leaders?

A team of leaders provides mutual support, broader insight, and stronger program development for the county. As the team grows larger (15 to 20 people), the intensity, depth, and breadth of the program tends to increase. Having a large team also reduces volunteer burnout.

Why is Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. a valuable addition to the programs in a county?

Mississippi's 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program has the highest value to county programs when used as a recruitment tool for young people and adults not already in the 4-H program. It appeals to a wide range of youth, in all socioeconomic levels, in both urban and rural settings. It promotes learning fundamental life skills and leads to exploration of careers and life-long hobby activities. It provides many links to the rest of the 4-H program, including leadership development. In short, the Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program is another tool you can use to increase the impact of 4-H in your community.

Why can't a single leader cover this project?

This program is too large for one person to provide the leadership necessary for the program's success. Training in a discipline requires 12 to 14 hours. Common subject matter requires another 6 to 8 hours. The format of the workshop does not permit multiple certifications in a single workshop.

In addition to the constraints of the training, two other problems, both potentially more serious, arise. First, the leader may feel overwhelmed by the work, electing either to give it up or to limit it to his or her own special interest. Although having a program delivered by someone with that special interest is ideal, limiting the program to one aspect severely cripples recruitment and retention potential. The other serious impact is the burnout problem previously mentioned. Asking one leader to cover everything in the Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program is like asking one leader to cover everything in livestock. Someone may try and may even have some success.

However, trying to do more than you can effectively accomplish without support will cause you to burn out very quickly.

What kind of experience or background is necessary for leaders?

The main requirement for leaders working with the Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program is a commitment to helping youth develop an eagerness to learn. An open and active mind is essential. Willingness to risk trying new methods or ideas is also helpful in building successful programs. Training, shooting skills, or certification from other programs can be helpful but are not essential. Experience with shooting and shooting instruction using other materials may present a barrier to learning sound 4-H instructional methods.

Excellent target shooters are not necessarily excellent instructors. The key to success is not shooting ability, but instructional ability. The trophy must be the development of the young person, making each young person a winner.

Send to the workshop a caring, self-disciplined person with a love for young people and a desire to help them. You will be rewarded with a motivated, well-prepared Mississippi 4-H S.A.F.E.T.Y. Program instructor.

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