THE 4-H VISION

Four-H will be recognized as an innovative, responsive leader in developing Alabama’s young people to become productive citizens and leaders in a complex and dynamic society. We will attain this vision through the collaborative, committed efforts of Extension professionals, youth, and volunteers.

OUR MISSION

Four-H is the youth development component of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Four-H helps young people from rural and urban areas explore their interests and expand their awareness of our world while providing opportunities to develop a greater sense of who they are and who they can become as contributing citizens of our communities, our state, our nation, and our world. This mission is achieved through research-based educational programs of Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities and an ongoing tradition of applied, hands-on/minds-on experiences that develop the heads, hearts, hands, and health of Alabama youth.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Responsiveness and Ownership
• Youth are involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating what 4-H offers, how we offer it, and when we offer it.
• Programs and delivery systems are continually evaluated to assure that they reflect the changing needs and interests of Alabama’s young people.
• Partnerships and collaborations are essential for successful youth development.
• Effective communications are vital within ACES and with groups who can and should support 4-H.

The Nature of Our Work
• Young people are assisted in acquiring the character, leadership, and social skills needed for life.
• Youth are helped to prepare for positive and productive roles in a diverse society.
• Volunteers must play an increasingly significant role. If we are to reach growing numbers of young people with quality programs, 4-H must draw upon the talents and expertise of many Alabama citizens who are concerned with our youth.
• It is imperative that 4-H provide real opportunities for all young people, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, geographic location, age, disability, or economic status. Four-H embraces diversity because it is good for our kids, our organization, and our society.
• We are committed to the traditional principles that have made 4-H great. Fully cited in the Four-Fold Youth Development Model, these principles include scientific methodology, creativity, problem solving, critical thinking, goals and accomplishments, volunteerism, good citizenship, teamwork and cooperation, communication, caring, personal responsibility, character and leadership development, and healthy lifestyles.
• Four-H can reach “any kid, any time, anywhere” with materials or activities that reflect the fundamental mission and principles of 4-H learning.

Visit our Web site at: www.AL4H.org
Approaches to Learning

- Youth should be offered a variety of learning experiences in their communities and in the larger world.
- Every aspect of 4-H programs and activities must be interesting and beneficial if 4-H is to successfully attract and retain youth participation.
- Young people must be given hands-on/minds-on opportunities to learn in environments that are experiential, meaningful, inspiring, and fun.

What We Teach

The Alabama 4-H program helps young people develop life skills that include making decisions, thinking critically, building relationships, exercising leadership, and developing a concern for the community and the environment. Four-H provides learning opportunities in the following areas:

- Science and Technology
- Leadership, Citizenship, and Volunteerism
- Communications and Expressive Arts
- Family and Consumer Sciences
- Environmental Education and Natural Resources
- Food and Fiber Systems

Strategic Goal
Reach Young People By Responding to Their Needs

- Increase the quality and quantity of youth involvement in all rural and urban Extension youth development programs
- Increase by 10 percent each year the number of young people reached by all aspects of Extension youth development in both rural and urban settings
- Expand the outreach of 4-H so that Alabama 4-H reflects local and state demographics and social and economic realities
- Increase by 10 percent each year the number of junior and senior high school participants

Implementation

- Develop processes through which 4-H continually assesses the needs and interests of Alabama youth and evaluates the relevance of 4-H programs and curricula
- Provide relevant, current, state-of-the-art educational projects, programs, activities, and events
- Go where the kids are and where the needs are
- Constantly evaluate the educational objectives of all 4-H programs, events, and activities to determine their relevance and relationship to the Four-Fold Youth Development Model and the System’s program priorities
- Increase the number of after-school programs, community-based clubs, special interest groups, conferences, workshops, and seminars on subjects of interest to Alabama’s young people
- Provide appropriate educational materials for youth based on needs of young people and current research on youth learning and interests
- Implement a comprehensive, multi-tiered youth leadership development institute for Alabama

Transform the Functions of ACES Personnel and Volunteers to Meet Changing Organizational and Staffing Realities

- By 2004, the majority of the 4-H program will be delivered by volunteers, supported and managed by agents and specialists.

Implementation

- Provide training in volunteer management and middle management to all Extension youth educators so they are skilled and comfortable in managing programs and organizing and motivating volunteers
- Provide ongoing, in-depth training in all aspects of 4-H to both new and veteran 4-H agents
- Increase the county agents’ role in program management and reduce the agents’ role in direct program delivery through the following:
1. Provide easy-to-use materials for volunteers and agents to use in delivering programs to youth
2. Develop a volunteer leader manual
3. Develop a statewide and county-by-county volunteer development plan and implementation process
4. Encourage chapter formation of organizations such as the Alabama Volunteer Leaders Association or Friends of 4-H

- Implement a volunteer recruitment and development process to increase volunteerism at all levels and in all areas

**STRATEGIC GOAL**

**Develop Partnerships and Support**

- Assure appropriate and effective relationships with formal education and with agencies and organizations whose missions and values complement Alabama 4-H
- Substantially increase private and public financial support of 4-H

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Work with the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation to

1. Continuously evaluate public and private funding sources; develop gift requests and contract proposals on a continuous basis
2. Maintain a potential major donor list
3. Develop proposals for major donors and maintain continuous contact with potential major donors
4. Develop a capital improvements program and encourage all state 4-H and other specialists to develop grant proposals in priority program areas, such as character education, environmental/natural resources, youth leadership, after-school programs, science and technology, and other areas of needs as determined by the System

- Create innovative strategies for funding programs and for reaching young people
- Develop partnerships with other youth development and advocacy groups
- Develop business and industry partnerships that support the 4-H programs of Science and Technology; Leadership, Citizenship, and Volunteerism; Communications and Expressive Arts; Family and Consumer Sciences; Environmental Education and Natural Resources; and Food and Fiber Systems
- Develop and implement a statewide image and marketing program
- Involve young people in marketing, communications, financial development, and programming efforts
- Implement volunteer guidelines and screening

**STRATEGIC GOAL**

**Expand the Role of the 4-H Youth Development Center**

- Through carefully planned enhancement of programs and facilities, build the Alabama 4-H Youth Development Center into one of the premier youth development and environmental education centers in the Southeast

**IMPLEMENTATION**

- Through improved communications, fully integrate the 4-H Center facility and staff into the Alabama 4-H program
- Clarify the mission, goals, and objectives of the Center through the development and implementation of a visionary strategic plan for the Center
- Work with the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation in developing a preeminent environmental education facility
- Expand programs and increase youth participation
R. Warren McCord, Extension State Program Leader

For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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