

4-H Youth Development Statewide Plan of Work

Summary

In 4-H, we believe in the power of young people. We see that every child has valuable strengths and real influence to improve the world we live in. New York State 4-H strives to create opportunities for all youth to reach their potential in settings where they can learn and grow in partnership with youth and caring adults, living all aspects of their identity and developing a sense of belonging. This plan is intended to provide a framework that supports efforts to monitor and evaluate how young people are experiencing positive youth development and thriving across the broad diversity of program efforts in NYS 4-H.

Purpose

Context and Evidence Base

Millions of young people face a widening opportunity gap in education, mental health, and access to programs that develop social connections, and access to career opportunities. These challenges threaten their potential and the growth and sustainability of our communities. Recent National 4-H Council research has shown that teens are looking for access to resources, knowledge, and services to close gaps and increase opportunities for growth. The evidence suggests that youth are thirsting for connectivity with their friends, families, and communities, and expecting communities and schools to improve access and education¹.

4-H provides young people with community, supportive adults, and learning opportunities that help them develop the skills they need to create positive change in their lives and communities. New York State 4-H programs are places for every youth to thrive. Positive Youth Development (PYD) is the heart and core purpose of CCE's 4-H program.

In 4-H, PYD is the idea that all youth have the potential for bright futures. Youth enter this path when they are personally enriched by the world around them and are making it better at the same time. 4-H helps youth thrive by

¹ National 4-H Council [4-H Youth Insights](#) surveys, June 2020.

creating opportunities to discover their greatest passions in a positive community of youth, and adults to support them.

The [4-H Thriving Model](#) is built on the premise that youth who participate in 4-H programs that provide a high-quality developmental context have a significantly higher likelihood of thriving, and thriving youth achieve key developmental outcomes.

High-quality developmental contexts are characterized by opportunities for youth to pursue their sparks, experience authentic belonging, and be in positive developmental relationships with peers and adults. In 4-H, youth pursue sparks through hands-on projects in areas like health, science, agriculture and civic engagement.

By engaging with the developmental context over time, with intensity, and in multiple ways, youth can attain a thriving orientation. This orientation is revealed by specific thriving indicators that include:

- Openness to challenge and discovery
- A growth mindset
- A hopeful purpose
- A prosocial orientation
- Transcendent awareness
- Positive emotionality
- The ability to set and manage individual goals

According to emerging research, youth who demonstrate these thriving indicators are likely to attain specific developmental outcomes. These outcomes include connection with others, contribution to the world around them, high personal standards, a strong sense of personal responsibility, a positive academic attitude, and social competence. Across the lifespan these outcomes extend to include academic or vocational success, civic engagement, employability, economic stability, happiness, and wellbeing.

In 4-H, we believe in the power of young people. We see that every child has valuable strengths and real influence to improve the world around them. New York State 4-H provides opportunities for every youth to reach their potential in a place where each person can belong as their full selves. All youth who participate in youth Extension programs are 4-H Members.

Goals

In NYS 4-H, we aim to realize our PYD vision by focusing on:

- PYD Practice - Aligning 4-H practice, program design, and professional development with the 4-H Thriving Model and the most current positive youth development research and best practices.
- Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion - Actively creating and sustaining a culture of belonging where individuals from diverse backgrounds and life experiences can fully contribute and thrive.
- Guilds – Creating and sustaining reflective learning communities within the overall NYS 4-H program structure that support PYD best practices.
- Transformational Learning - Opportunities that are centered on youth sparks, youth voice, and weave together positive youth development with learning.

Audience

- Young people ages 5 to 19
- Families, parents, and caregivers
- Youth development educators, staff, and volunteers
- Organizational partners at the state and local levels
- Cornell University campus partners and resources

Educational Strategies

4-H weaves together positive youth development with experiential learning to create culturally relevant learning experiences. Learning in 4-H is an active, intentional, and reflective process where young people develop understanding, skills, and new habits. The nature of the experiences can be vastly different in 4-H, but the underlying process and educational philosophy should reflect the same core principles.

4-H helps youth discover and explore their sparks by providing learning experiences based on their interests.

Pillar Areas

Topics fall into one of our four program pillar areas.

In **Agriculture and Food Systems** programs, youth can be powerful members and shapers of food systems. By developing agricultural, food, and food system literacies in youth today, we are preparing them to become more responsible consumers and obtain skills necessary for various career opportunities.

Through **4-H Civic Engagement** programs, youth learn about civic affairs, build decision-making skills, and develop a sense of understanding and

confidence in relating and connecting to other people. These life skills help grow 4-H youth into true leaders who impact and influence their communities.

4-H Healthy Living programs empower 4-H youth to make healthy decisions and balance physical, mental, and emotional health. The confidence and skills to lead healthy lifestyles enable youth to tackle life's challenges today and become leaders in their lives, careers, and communities.

In **4-H STEM programs** (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), we create supportive relationships that nurture wonder and fuel learning through investigation and design. Youth and adults work together to create new understanding and design solutions to address issues in their communities.

The goal moving forward is to identify and support [Signature Programs](#) in each pillar area that exemplify high-quality 4-H experiences and are available across the state and across program settings for all youth.

Program Setting

4-H youth development programs are available wherever youth are. Youth experience 4-H in a variety of settings including in-school and after-school programs, school and community clubs, 4-H camps, and at home.

State Events and Programs

In addition to the programs offered at the county level, the NYS 4-H office supports programs for youth each year in collaboration with our county CCE 4-H staff, including: 4-H Career Explorations, the State Teen Action Representatives Retreat (STARR), International 4-H Exchange, 4-H at the NYS Fair, National 4-H conferences, and [more](#).

Evaluation

Purpose

The plan aims to evaluate how young people have the opportunity to thrive across all their experiences in local, regional, and state NYS 4-H youth development programs. The process of supporting positive youth development and youth developing a thriving mindset is the underlying purpose that unites all NYS 4-H Youth Development and so is the focus of this statewide plan of work.

Evaluation efforts can be intentional about measuring thriving outcomes based on experience goals. For example, experiences that are focused on

youth exploring sparks, or experiences that focus on welcoming youth into the 4-H community, may align best with evaluation efforts that are looking at the developmental context. 4-H experiences with high engagement (intensity, duration, breadth) may be more ideal for evaluation efforts that look at how youth are developing thriving mindsets and measure thriving indicators.

The indicators outlined below represent positive youth development impacts shared across our state, regional, and local programs and reported through the CCE reporting processes. Other outcomes, such as increased content knowledge, are important parts of telling the story of 4-H and may be reported through other statewide, regional, and local processes for different stakeholders. NYS 4-H has resources available to support these complementary evaluation efforts.

Outcome Indicators

5.1 4-H Youth Development: Thriving Young People

Output Indicators	Near-term Outcome Indicators	Mid-Term Outcome Indicators	Long-Term Outcome Indicators
<p>Number of youth participating in 4-H pillar areas (Ag & Food Systems, Civic Engagement, Healthy Living, STEM)</p> <p>Number of youth participating in 4-H contexts (Clubs, Camps, In-School, Afterschool, Online)</p> <p>Number of youth participating in Signature Programs</p> <p>Number of youth participating in state events and programs</p>	<p><u>Developmental context</u></p> <p>(5.1a) Number of young people who discover and explore their Sparks through 4-H experiences</p> <p>(5.1b) Number of young people who experience Developmental Relationships in 4-H</p> <p>(5.1c) Number of young people who experience Belonging in 4-H</p>	<p><u>Thriving Indicators</u></p> <p>(5.1d) Number of youth who enjoy a challenge and like to explore new things (Openness to Challenge & Discovery)</p> <p>(5.1e) Number of youth who embrace new experiences as a growth opportunity and welcome challenges (Growth Mindset)</p> <p>(5.1f) Number of youth who have a sense of purpose in life, and optimism for future (Hopeful Purpose)</p> <p>(5.1g) Number of youth who are respectful, honest, responsible, caring, and value helping others (Pro-social Orientation)</p> <p>(5.1h) Number of youth who strive to connect with something bigger than themselves (Transcendent Awareness)</p> <p>(5.1i) Number of youth who are generally positive and optimistic, and can manage their emotions (Positive Emotionality)</p> <p>(5.1j) Number of youth who set goals, create effective strategies to achieve them, and persevere, making adjustments when necessary to achieve those goals (Intentional Self-regulation, Goal Setting and Management)</p>	<p><u>Developmental and long-term outcomes</u></p> <p>Number of youth who grow in competence with their skills.</p> <p>Number of youth who have high personal standards.</p> <p>Number of youth who are more connected to their world.</p> <p>Number of youth who experience academic motivation and success</p> <p>Number of youth who engage in fewer risk behaviors</p> <p>Number of youth who make healthful choices</p> <p>Number of youth who contribute to others such as their family, friends, community, club, country, and world</p> <p>Number of youth who reflect outwardly their internal state of happiness and wellbeing</p>

5.2 4-H Youth Development: Adult volunteers supporting youth thriving through developmental relationships

Output Indicators	Near-term Outcome Indicators	Mid-Term Outcome Indicators	Long-Term Outcome Indicators
<p>Number of volunteers in casual roles</p> <p>Number of volunteers in enrolled roles</p> <p>Number of hours of professional development for 4-H volunteers</p> <p>Number of volunteer hours provided by 4-H volunteers (total)</p>	<p>(5.2a) Number of enrolled active 4-H volunteers demonstrating increased understanding of sparks and the connection to youth thriving.</p> <p>(5.2b) Number of enrolled active 4-H volunteers demonstrating increased understanding of belonging and the connection to youth thriving.</p> <p>(5.2c) Number of enrolled active 4-H volunteers demonstrating increased understanding of developmental relationships and their connection to youth thriving.</p>	<p>(5.2d) Number of volunteers creating experiences for youth based on youth interests and sparks</p> <p>(5.2e) Number of volunteers creating spaces where youth experience belonging</p> <p>(5.2f) Number of 4-H volunteers who express care for young people</p> <p>(5.2g) Number of 4-H volunteers who challenge young people to grow</p> <p>(5.2h) Number of 4-H volunteers who provide support for young people</p> <p>(5.2i) Number of 4-H volunteers who share power with young people</p> <p>(5.2j) Number of 4-H volunteers who expand possibilities for young people</p>	<p>Youth and adults work in meaningful partnerships to help their communities thrive</p>

Evaluation Methods

Each of the plans addresses a broad combination of applied research and Extension initiatives spanning multiple audiences, methods, and intended outcomes. We work towards this goal by doing two things—professional development to enhance the evaluation capacity of our system, and collecting documentation of local, regional, and statewide programs.

A combination of routine program monitoring and documentation, near-term outcome assessment, and targeted follow-up activities provides a

comprehensive assessment. Impacts may be documented through survey tools such as national [4-H Thriving Model evaluation tools](#) and 4-H Common Measures, observation and reflection tools such as the Search Institute Relationships Check, or photo documentation tools like Snap Shots. Evaluation may be embedded in learning activities such as evaluation of youth presentations or project creations through reflective dialogues, or by reviewing record books and portfolios.