
Title: Georgia 4-H Trains Faculty & Staff for Virtual Programming Delivery

Author: Kasey Bozeman

Summary: Georgia 4-H offered 7 trainings for 4-H professionals related to providing virtual learning experiences for 4-H youth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Situation: As COVID-19 cases increased across the state of Georgia in early spring 2020, many safety precautions were taken to reduce risk and minimize potential exposure. Most traditional educational settings, such as schools, libraries, and County Extension offices were forced to discontinue face-to-face activities. Many County Extension 4-H professionals began to offer virtual 4-H programming, trying to reach traditional and new clientele through a variety of means by providing both synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences. During the spring and summer, some 4-H programs hosted online club meetings, judging team practices, educational activities, and even virtual summer camps. As school systems began to share 2020-2021 operating plans, county 4-H programs shifted their typical in-person delivery to hybrid or virtual offerings.

Response: Extension programming during the COVID-19 pandemic provides the opportunity for innovative and non-traditional delivery methods. Delivering content via technology in virtual settings is a new endeavor for practically all 4-H professionals within Georgia. A gap in basic knowledge and technical skills needed these deliver virtual 4-H programs was quickly identified within the Georgia 4-H workforce. Georgia 4-H quickly responded by offering three training sessions in early spring 2020 to increase confidence and skill set as it relates to virtual program delivery. These 45-minute overview sessions consisted of practical ways that information could be conveyed by sharing the concepts of a flipped classroom, graphic organizers, and live-response feedback tools. These quick-response learning opportunities assisted 4-H professionals with spring programming – which mainly focused on judging team preparation, project achievement, and educational activities. Once it became apparent that many counties were going to have to offer hybrid or virtual 4-H in-school club meetings, Georgia 4-H responded by planning and implementing an additional four trainings in late summer, specifically focusing on delivering content with school partners. These 90-minute trainings consisted of teaching general virtual activity engagement strategies, facilitating science-related content, and then specific platforms that can be helpful in these delivery modes, such as Flippity and Fligrd. Trainings were offered to all 4-H faculty and staff; participants were allowed to self-register, selecting the most appropriate sessions for their needs.

Results/Impacts: The three initial training offered in the spring of 2020 were attended by 157 Extension professionals, with an additional 37 people viewing the recordings of these sessions. The primary attendees were 4-H county faculty and staff. These learning opportunities provided 4-H professionals an opportunity to begin to plan and program differently during this time. One 4-H professional commented, “these sessions were great and really got me thinking about how I can do things differently – both in-person and virtual.”

The four trainings offered in the later summer of 2020 were attended by 439 Extension professionals in real-time, with an additional 46 people viewing the recordings of these sessions. While the majority of the attendees were county 4-H employees, faculty and staff from district offices, the state office, and 4-H facilities joined the sessions. An assessment tool was electronically distributed to participants after the sessions. Survey results indicated an increase in knowledge of the platforms, comfort level using online tools, and being able to select a tool based on educational goals were all gained by the participants. Additionally, all submitted responses (n=78) indicated new confidence in being able to create effective online lessons and participants will use this information in the future. After the sessions, one 4-H professional shared, “I would personally like to thank you for sending out all of this information, it has helped me tremendously. Hopefully, I will get to use all of this knowledge with somebody soon, but for real, keep it coming, because I really appreciate it! It is making me a better, more prepared person.”

Preparing 4-H faculty and staff to be prepared to deliver content regardless of delivery mode is critical to the Georgia 4-H’s continued success. Because of the ever-changing situation with COVID-19 as it related to program delivery, additional learning experiences coordinated by Georgia 4-H are being planned for professionals throughout the year. External training opportunities from credible, research-based institutions are also being shared, such as the Afterschool Coaching for Reflective Educators in STEM (ACRES) for the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance. As the COVID-19 situation continues, Georgia 4-H remains committed to ensuring 4-H professionals are sharing content using the most effective and efficient means.