Frequently Asked Questions

Why does 4-H have a Shooting Sports program?
4-H uses shooting sports to teach youth development. Our programs are valuable for helping young people develop self-confidence, personal discipline, responsibility, teamwork, self-esteem, sportsmanship as well as other life skills. The skills required for the responsible use of firearms carries over into many other parts of life. 4-H Shooting Sports Programs provide a positive experience for youth and promote the safe and ethical use of firearms. It is our belief that firearm education reduces gun accidents. Hunting and shooting have been a strong part of our American tradition, and the 4-H shooting sports programs helps to continue this tradition through involvement of the whole family.

How did the 4-H Shooting Sports program get started?
Shooting Sports have been a part of 4-H since the 1930’s when there were shooting competitions in many states. There was also shooting sports at some 4-H camps that had ranges. However, there was no organized training program where leaders were taught how to teach youth about shooting. In 1976, staff members in Texas realized that there needed to be a training program in place to teach volunteers how to teach shooting skills. They requested that this be done as an expansion of the existing rifle project. Approval was given, and 4-H Shooting Sports was born. After being effective in Texas, it was decided in 1977 that the program should be expanded to include other states.

Do you have to be a 4-H Member to be in a 4-H Shooting Sports club?
Yes, Shooting Sports Club members are required to be part of the 4-H program. Contact your local extension office for more information on how to join 4-H.

Why is it so important that members are enrolled as regular 4-H members as well?
To ensure our positive youth development focus and for ISU liability reasons, all youth in our shooting sports programs must be club members. If a young person is a member of another county club, they would only need to pay the program development fee ($30) once per year. If you have a special interest club or program that includes non-members, then these young people still must pay the program development fee and enroll as 4-H members. Our goal is to make sure all of our youth involved in shooting sports have access to all activities, events and programs that their county and the state offers.
**What do 4-H Shooting Sports Club members do at club meetings?**
Club meetings typically consist of a short program and an hour or more of shooting practice. Many clubs go on field trips and invite guest speakers to share special talents or interesting experiences with club members. Business meetings, fundraising activities and special community service projects are sometimes part of the club's yearly plan. All shooting sports programs must adhere to the elements that make up a 4-H club experience: communication activities, opportunities for leadership, record-keeping, and be on-going programs at least 6 hours per length per year with a caring adult. In addition to shooting, clubs can add related programs like Wildlife, Reloading, Taxidermy, Trapping, Natural Resources, Gunsmithing, Outdoor Cooking, or anything the club is interested in learning more about.

**What shooting sports disciplines are currently offered in Iowa?**
We currently have statewide programs offered in Shotgun, Rifle (air rifle & smallbore/.22 rifles), Archery (recurve & compound), and Muzzleloader (black powder). All of these disciplines may not be offered in your county, so check with your local club.

**How do I find a club to join?**
[Click here](#) to see if your county has a 4-H Shooting Sports club or contact your county extension office. Contact the leaders to find out about meeting times and activities. Kids are allowed to be members in a county that they do not live in, as long as they attend the meetings and activities. If there is not a club currently offered in your county, you can begin the process of getting one started.

**What does it cost?**
In Iowa, there is a $30 fee to be a 4-H member. Many counties pay a portion of this fee. If a member has already paid this fee, they do not have to pay again, although some clubs may have an additional membership fee to cover the cost of materials. Check with your local club for more details on costs.

**Do I need to bring my own equipment?**
Many counties have equipment that is provided for the club members. This way anyone can participate. It also lets members find out what they prefer to work with and what fits them the best. However, most clubs allow members to bring their own equipment with some rules if they choose to. Check with your local club for more details on their equipment policies.

**If members bring their own equipment, does it need to be certified by a gunsmith before they can use it?**
If you have certified instructors in that discipline, they should have the expertise to decide if the firearm is safe, unsafe, or needs to be checked by a gunsmith. Most clubs usually do not require a check by a gunsmith but require that any firearm or bow that isn't the club's property be inspected and approved by the certified instructor.

**How old do the youth have to be to participate in the program?**
Youth need to be at least 9 years old and in 4th grade to participate in a 4-H Shooting Sports club. Youth must be at least 11 years old to participate in shotgun discipline and 12 to be in shotgun competitions. Muzzleloader has similar restrictions – youth must be 12 to participate and need to have completed all the muzzleloader lessons to compete. In order to qualify and compete at the National 4-H Invitational Match, youth must be 14 years old as of January 1 of the invitational year.
It says members have to be 11 to participate in shotgun and 12 to be in competitions. Is this age 12 to be in shotgun competition, or all competitions?

Shotgun and Muzzleloader are the only areas that have age restrictions for competition and participation. Youth must be 12 years old to compete in shotgun competitions and 12 to participate in Muzzleloader.

What competitions are available to participate in?

Although competition is only a small part of the program, there are chances for youth to test their skills against others from across the state. There is an annual shoot for all age levels, which is usually held in the fall. A statewide senior shoot, which serves as the qualifying match for the national invitational is held in conjunction with the state match. Winter and summer postal matches are also an opportunity to compete statewide. Additionally, many counties and regions will sponsor shoots you are allowed to attend.

What is a “Postal Match,” and what are the rules for them?

Postal matches are an easy way for the kids to compete against each other without having to really travel anywhere. The rules are posted on the website and differ by discipline. What basically happens is that the kids shoot at their local range at the meeting or another time, and the scores are collected and then sent to the postal match coordinator. Everyone in all the counties uses the same targets and same rules so that things are as fair as possible. The scores are then added up and at the end of the time, there is a winner.

How do you start a 4-H Shooting Sports Club?

If there is not currently a Shooting Sports program in your county and you would like to start one, find a team of adults who are also interested and attend the next statewide training that is available. Then find youth in the county that are interested in joining the club, and enroll with the county extension office. Start meeting with the club, and enjoy leaning together!

Can parents be involved?

Yes! In fact, parents are encouraged to be involved. Parents can help out with safety and act as assistant instructors for many activities.

Who leads the club?

Adult leaders who have completed a state training for the program serve as leaders for the club. These leaders are interested in working with young people on shooting skills, as well as life skills. Certified leaders may also train assistant volunteer instructors to help with their club on the county level. All county-level practices must be performed with at least one certified instructor present in each discipline area that is being taught.

How can I become a certified instructor?

To become a certified instructor you must attend the state certification workshop. In order to be eligible, you must be at least 21 years old and be approved through the child protection and safety policy screening process. You must also be able to work with both youth and adults, have an interest in shooting sports, and have some knowledge of shooting techniques.
When is the next instructor training?
When an instructor training is scheduled, details will be posted on the “SESS Calendar of Events” website. Keep checking for more information as it becomes available. We usually hold trainings twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall.

What support is available for club leaders and members?
Certified 4-H Shooting Sports Instructors receive teaching materials when they complete the weekend Shooting Sports Workshop. Each county should have one or more Shooting Sports Coordinators to help leaders with club organization, promotion, and fundraising. In addition, the State 4-H Shooting Sports Committee works to promote the program across the state and to identify corporate sponsors.

If the club purchases a firearm, whose name does the firearm go under?
Can a 4-H Shooting Sports Club own a firearm?
The method recommended at National Coordinators training is to have whoever is purchasing the firearm to fill out the federal paper work and sign it with their name but directly underneath write the name of the club - for example, for Keokuk County 4-H Shooting Sports. If you can use the county offices address in the paper work, that much the better. Unless you are a gun shop or other similar entity, you can’t own firearms (so 4-H Shooting Sports can’t own them). However, using the office’s address and writing the club under the signature gives the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms people a paper trail and should relieve the signee of any negligence as far as ATF is concerned.

One of our members is doing an educational presentation on gun safety and wants to use a shotgun in the presentation. Is this allowed at the county and/or state fair?
For an educational presentation at the county level, it is recommended that the member bring the gun cased, trigger locks installed, and it should be inoperable. Leave the ammo at home. It is suggested that the member check the gun in with extension staff when they arrive, obtain it in time for the presentation, and then remove the gun from the presentation area and secure it in their vehicle immediately when finished. There is no reason not to select a qualified exhibit or presentation using firearm(s) for the state fair. However, you should check with your county office to see if there are any other rules or policies that pertain to the use of firearms in presentations/exhibits. The Iowa State Fair policy is no firearms (or other weapons) on the fairgrounds during the Iowa State Fair. We have asked about their use in exhibits and educational presentations, and the State Fair Patrol has consistently said “no means no.” There is not an exception during the state fair for the 4-H building, no matter what security precautions we might offer. The member will need to modify his or her presentation to use a model or some other prop to substitute for the gun. We realize this is sometimes a little awkward for the 4-H’er but believe our members are resourceful and will make the best of the situation.
How can our club or county handle firearm ownership?
First, we share with our county offices that if possible to develop a partnership with a local sportsman's club and use their equipment if needed. This is happening in some counties.

If this isn't possible, only buy a small inventory of starter equipment - air rifles (that don't require ATF forms), and shotguns and muzzleloaders (which do). After a youth shoots a few times, they are purchasing their own, so a big inventory is not needed. We do not have a pistol program, so this is not an issue.

If a county or club program feels they need to purchase firearms, the "owner" would need to be an official volunteer or in some cases the county director may be the "owner." Since the equipment officially belongs either to a county club or an extension office, we have asked the county to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to be written between the county Extension office and the volunteer, clearly stating who owns the firearm. We have a form that can be used. Some counties are purchasing a separate insurance policy on the firearms.

Where can I get more information on 4-H Shooting Sports?
Your local county extension office will have information about what is happening in your county. You can also check the website, http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/projects/ShootingSports/, which is updated often with more details about the program and activities. If you still have questions, contact Bryan Whaley (bwhaley@iastate.edu or (515) 332-2201).