impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Training prepares 4-H professionals to protect youth and volunteers

AT A GLANCE

Hands-on training raised University of Idaho Extension 4-H professionals' knowledge of new volunteer policies from 71% to 88%, with the biggest gains in youth safety.

The Situation

Adult volunteers are central to the University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development program. Research shows that gaps in training, support and communication are key reasons volunteers leave 4-H programs. In Idaho, 4-H professionals in 42 county UI Extension offices recruit, screen and support these volunteers. When professionals are unsure of the rules, youth safety and fairness to volunteers both suffer.

County professionals reported that Idaho's volunteer process was confusing and applied differently from county to county. New 2026-2028 Policy and Procedures, revised volunteer roles and new reporting steps took effect Oct. 1, 2026. Professionals needed to learn them quickly. Before training, most rated themselves not at all or only slightly confident choosing the right forms (68%) or deciding how serious a volunteer concern was (64%).

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development delivered a two-part training for 4-H professionals. A September 2026 Zoom session introduced the changes to 60 Extension professionals from 31 of Idaho's 42 county offices, along with Extension leadership.



University of Idaho Extension professionals connect at a statewide gathering. Photo by Teresa Tverdy.

In October 2026 4-H In-Service in Twin Falls, a one-hour interactive session let professionals practice the new rules. Activities included a true-or-false game on policy changes, a scavenger hunt through a new Conflict Navigation Manual and real-world scenarios on which form to use and when to report. Each participant received a printed manual and a documentation notebook. Professionals completed the same nine-question knowledge check before and after the session to measure learning.

Program Outcomes

The training produced clear, measurable growth. Among the 27 professionals who completed both checks, the average score rose from 71% to 88%. Twenty-two of 27 improved, and the gain was

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statistically significant (Wilcoxon signed-rank test, p <.001). The share scoring eight or nine out of nine tripled, from 26% to 78%. Scores rose on seven of nine questions, with the largest gains tied to youth safety.

Table 1. Professionals' knowledge of new volunteer processes before and after training.

Correct answers	Before	After
First step when a youth discloses abuse	52%	96%
Right form for a two-person conflict	63%	96%
Written reasons needed to deny recertification	74%	96%
Privately messaging a minor is a Tier 3 concern	70%	93%
Overall score	71%	88%

Participants also plan to put this learning into practice. In the next six months, 92% plan to follow the incident reporting steps when an incident involves a minor, and 88% plan to hold a documented conversation when a volunteer concern comes up.

The Future

Results showed two topics need more clarity: who receives incident reports and how declining an applicant differs from denying recertification. Follow-up training will address both. A six-month follow-up survey will check whether University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development professionals put the training into practice.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- University of Idaho Risk Management
- University of Idaho legal counsel
- Western Region Volunteer Association

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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University of Idaho, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Idaho counties cooperating.
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