

# Project Abstract Summary

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**Funding Opportunity Number**

WSFR2023017812

**CFDA(s)**

15.628

**Applicant Name**

Wildlife Management Institute

**Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project**

2024 MSCGP - ACI Increasing Shooting Sports Participation by Introduction and Education through Schools

**Project Abstract**

By 2020, approximately 11% of Americans 16 and older went target shooting annually, but only 9% of youth from 9 to 15 years participated. Similarly, 61% of hunters had started by the age of 17 (DOI, DOJ, Southwick). Recognizing most adults adopt their preferred recreational activities in their youth, the future of target shooting and its correlated conservation funding mandates that young people have safe opportunities to try the sport. However, considering a majority of youth live in urban and suburban areas, with most in non-shooting or non-hunting households, the opportunity for youth to try target shooting is limited. It is paramount we bring shooting education opportunities to youth where they live rather than expect them to find us.

To reach youths where they live, the Student Air Rifle Program (SAR) was created. Modeled after the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) and with their help, SAR works with state wildlife agencies to provide young people with a safe introduction to firearms. SAR employs a "teach the teacher" approach. Once trained, SAR's instructors initiate safe and fun air rifle programs as part of schools' physical education programs using SAR's education materials and equipment resources. SAR continues to expand into parks and other recreation programs, scouting programs, and similar. The program is funded by sponsors, partners, equipment sales, and tournament participation. Focused on youth in grades 4 through 12 and launched in 2014, SAR now has nearly 500 trained Basic Air Riflery Instructors in eight states who have served over 18,000 youth, with annual participation growing rapidly. We currently have formal relationships with the wildlife agencies in KS, PA and TX with TN scheduled to come on board in 2023. Working in partnership with the Association for Conservation Information (ACI), the goal is to expand SAR into many more states, with the support and input from state wildlife agencies.

However, expansion will be difficult until states and potential partners know key points about SAR such as the conversion rates (students becoming independent target shooters), the sales of taxable product generated by students, if students later introduce others to the shooting sports, if participation actually or potentially leads to an interest in hunting, and more. Once these research tasks are completed through interviews and surveys of students, volunteers and state agencies, four states will be engaged to launch new SAR programs in part using the research results to evaluate effectiveness. These states will serve as models for other states to consider. The ultimate results will be increased number of youth target shooting participants via school-based programs.