

National Hunting & Shooting Sports Action Plan

Strategies for Recruiting,
Retaining and Reactivating Hunting
and Shooting Sports Participants

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DRAFT
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**COUNCIL
TO ADVANCE
HUNTING AND
THE SHOOTING
SPORTS**

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Key Terms / Definitions

Agency or Agencies: State fish and wildlife management agencies

Conservation Organization: Nongovernmental organization whose mission is conservation and who are supportive of hunting and the shooting sports

Shooting Sports Organization: Nongovernmental organization whose mission is the training and promotion of shooting sports

Industry: Retailers, manufacturers and representative trade associations who support hunting and the shooting sports and who have a vested interest in the excise tax funding model

Participants: Individuals who engage in hunting and/or the shooting sports

Plan or National Plan: "National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan - Strategies for Recruiting, Retaining and Reactivating Hunting and Shooting Sports Participants"

PR: Pittman-Robertson - Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937

R3: Recruitment, retention, and reactivation

Stakeholders: Agencies, conservation and shooting sports organizations, and industry



Introduction

Why a National Action Plan?

Participation in hunting and, until recently, the shooting sports has been steadily declining since the 1980s.¹ The decline in these activities, which sustain a multi-billion-dollar industry and provide the primary financial support for state-level wildlife conservation in the U.S., poses an ever-increasing threat to wildlife conservation. Early in the 20th century, sportsmen and -women, as well as conservation leaders recognized the critical need for a significant and sustainable source of funding for wildlife management. The revenue generated through the sale of licenses and sporting arms equipment has provided the foundation for the most successful model of wildlife conservation in the world.

According to recent conservative estimates, there are approximately 13.7 million hunters and more than 40 million shooting sports participants in the U.S.² Their combined activities support more than 1.5 million jobs annually and have produced nearly \$110 billion in economic output. Thanks to an excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition established in 1937, hunters and recreational shooters have generated more than \$10.5 billion for the conservation of wildlife and its habitat. In recognition of this, state fish and wildlife agencies, conservation and shooting sports organizations, and the hunting/shooting sports industry have invested heavily in recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) initiatives in an effort to reverse the decline in participation. Unfortunately, the results of those efforts have been met with limited success and the general consensus among stakeholders is that a more strategic approach to sustaining the population of hunting and shooting sports participants is critically needed.

Research directed by the Wildlife Management Institute in 2009 documented more than 400 R3 programs being conducted in the U.S. by agencies and conservation organizations alone. Not included are the myriad of other programs administered by industry and trade organizations. Despite an enormous national effort and the investment of more than \$30 million annually, coordination and evaluation of these programs have been minimal and their effectiveness is generally unmeasured and unknown.³

In recent years, R3 experts and researchers have begun to identify the complexity of the challenge facing stakeholders working to stabilize and increase the population of hunting and shooting sports participants in the U.S. There is a growing recognition that R3 efforts must expand beyond simply providing hands-on learning opportunities. Generating more participants from new and existing target audiences will require multi-pronged marketing campaigns, outreach efforts and business practices that provide customer-centric resources such as easy-to-access and -understand information, straight-

1 "National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, & Wildlife-Associated Recreation" U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program

2 "Hunting in America 2011 Report" National Shooting Sports Foundation, Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, Rob Southwick Associates

3 "Hunting Heritage Action Plan Recruitment and Retention Assessment Survey Report," Wildlife Management Institute, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, DJ Case and Associates

forward rules and regulations, convenient licensing structure and sales processes, and increased access to places to hunt and shoot.

Until very recently, most R3 efforts have focused heavily on programs that provide the novice with introductory trial opportunities that, at best, increase awareness of or interest in hunting and the shooting sports. Moreover, these efforts have generally only served the youth of traditional audiences (white, male, middle-aged), and have thus catered to those already likely to be mentored into hunting or recreational shooting by their families.

As a result, national and state R3 efforts have done very little to recruit new participants from multiple demographics and provide them with the various learning opportunities they need to graduate from an interested observer to an active participant.

The R3 programs administered by agencies, conservation and shooting sports organizations, and outdoor industries have remained largely uncoordinated and duplicative in their efforts. There exists an unrealized potential for partnerships within the conservation community to align the programs, efforts, and financial resources necessary to establish recruitment pathways, whereby participants can be presented with an array of experiences and contacts over time that allow them to be mentored into hunting and the shooting sports.

Partnerships within the stakeholder community, in conjunction with an integrated framework to identify needed strategies and effectiveness measures, are key to stabilizing and increasing the number of hunting and shooting sports participants. Coordination of local and national efforts under a unified plan will provide clarity regarding where R3 initiatives are needed and the resources are required to support those efforts. Additionally, a national plan will provide guidance and structure for partnerships that can effectively meet the needs of the new audiences who will ultimately inherit our nation's hunting and shooting sports heritage. Finally, a coordinated national strategy can provide direction regarding how the conservation community will need to address the challenges of the future—how we build a pathway leading to a lifelong participant and how we help the next generation complete that journey.

The purpose of the National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan (Plan) is to identify, coordinate, and align resources available for R3 at local and national levels. Implementing the Plan's recommendations will help ensure that the hunting and shooting sports heritage of the United States will persist into the future.

What Are Our Goals?

The goals, or ultimate outcomes, of this plan are twofold:

- 1. To increase participation in hunting and the shooting sports.**
- 2. To increase support for hunting and the shooting sports.**

Although these outcomes are broad, they represent the primary desired results for any local, state, or national initiative designed to recruit, retain, or reactivate hunting and shooting sports participants.

Although simple to state, these outcomes are — at best — challenging to achieve.

Therefore, this plan prescribes the processes, strategies, and immediate steps that must be implemented by R3 stakeholders in order to begin delivering efforts that, when coordinated effectively, will begin to move the needle on hunting and shooting sports participation.



How Do We Get It Done?

The R3 efforts documented by the research⁴ identified earlier in this document demonstrate the powerful culture of doers that have mounted remarkable efforts to sustain hunting and shooting sports traditions in the United States. Unfortunately, these dedicated individuals have not had the luxury of advancing their strategies, results, or data through standardized methods or adaptive management.

This lack of comprehensive strategies and a networked professional R3 community has resulted in two primary consequences:

1. Organizations committed to R3 for hunting and the shooting sports have not invested in the necessary capacity to design, coordinate, implement, evaluate, and adapt strategies capable of maximizing the ultimate outcomes of their efforts; namely, a) producing new hunting or shooting sports participants, b) retaining those who currently participate, c) reinvigorating those who have lapsed, or d) increasing overall support for these activities.

For effective R3 efforts, an organization's capacity should include:

- A dedicated R3 coordinator or team,
 - Coordination and partnership with other R3 efforts,
 - An understanding and application of R3 models, pathways, and best practices,
 - Evaluation systems that can track participant behaviors and provide data that can prove and improve R3 efforts.
2. R3 strategies currently being implemented by stakeholders do not address all of the threats and opportunities to sustaining or increasing populations of hunters and shooting sports participants in the United States. The majority of R3 efforts implemented in the past have focused on only a selection of the threats impacting hunting and shooting sports populations, thus producing a skewed focus on R3 strategies that overlook critical opportunities to increase participation. Underserved or missed opportunities include:
 - Adult audiences
 - Female audiences
 - Social support networks for new participants
 - Interorganizational R3 efforts that link one program to the next

4 "Hunting Heritage Action Plan Recruitment and Retention Assessment Survey Report," Wildlife Management Institute, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, DJ Case and Associates

- Self-learning tools for beginners
- Mentors and trainers, particularly minority or nonwhite
- Funding of outcome-focused programs
- Clearly defined customer pathways with identified critical touch points

In order to achieve success in R3 initiatives at local and national levels, organizations must increase their capacity and implement targeted strategies aligned with their R3 goals. The focus on R3 must shift from a shotgun approach of actions, to one that targets outcomes. This means doing things differently, not necessarily doing more things. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a single organization to offer all the R3 events, programs, or campaigns needed to address the variety of potential hunting and shooting sports participants. However, it is important to recognize that each stakeholder presents unique expertise and resources capable of providing effective opportunities that engage participants along various portions of the recruitment pathway. By building capacity in a parallel approach, agencies, conservation NGOs, and industry can combine expertise and resources to connect potential participants to multiple opportunities and move them through the necessary stages needed to become lifelong participants.

This plan addresses both the capacity (page 16) and strategy (page 17 and Appendix A) deficiencies outlined above.

The National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan Development Workgroup recognized that R3 stakeholders vary widely in their capacities, focus, specialties, and resources. Thus, the recommendations in this plan are not intended to be one-size-fits-all. Rather, they document the range of solutions that must be implemented and coordinated in order to achieve the ultimate outcomes of R3 and this plan. Only a broad coalition of local and national stakeholders guided by outcome-focused strategies will have the combined resources, expertise, core capabilities, and scope of influence necessary to implement the recommendations of this plan.

First Steps in Building Local and National R3 Success

In the decade prior to the drafting of this plan, numerous research reports^{5,6} revealed that the bulk of R3 efforts being implemented had been developed without first identifying clear goals and objectives that reflected actual opportunities to increase the number of hunters and recreational shooters.

Although many of these efforts were innovative in concept, they frequently fell short of documenting or producing the desired outcome; namely, new hunting or shooting sports participants or increased avidity among participants. Programs were usually developed within organizational silos, and, for the most part, catered to the existing base of hunting and shooting sports participants. Thus, by default, these efforts most frequently engaged individuals who were already well on their way to becoming participants, largely missing new audiences whom R3 staff assumed were in attendance.

In addition to fostering inefficiency and low or untracked return-on-investment, this untargeted approach allowed organizations committed to hunting and shooting sports R3 to establish impressive suites and scopes of programs without instituting a data-driven framework to validate or improve the effect of their efforts on hunting or shooting sports populations.

A significant consequence of the absence of targeted R3 campaigns that are driven and adapted by outcomes is the lack of organizational capacity to improve efforts over time using an adaptive management approach. Stated simply, organizations have not invested in infrastructure or evaluation frameworks that produce data capable of documenting an R3 effort's effect on its target audience. As a result, organizations have not been challenged to foster an internal culture that rigorously collects results capable of proving how, or if, an effort should be adapted, abandoned, or connected to other efforts in order to improve the organization's impact on R3.

On a national scale, this lack of formative evaluation and structure affords the R3 community little of the information essential to identifying which efforts are the most needed, effective, efficient, or scalable.

In order to change this institutional culture from one that justifies R3 efforts by outputs (such as the number of people who attend, or the number of programs conducted in a year), to one that validates and adapts its efforts according to outcomes (such as the number of times participants hunt or target shoot after the R3 interaction, the amount of gear they purchase, the amount of time they spend using their skills and equipment post-R3 program, or overcoming the participants' stated barriers to hunting or target shooting post-R3 program), organizations must first coordinate and build their capacity to

5 "Hunting Heritage Action Plan Recruitment and Retention Assessment Survey Report," Wildlife Management Institute, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, DJ Case and Associates

6 "Effectiveness of Hunting, Shooting, and Fishing Recruitment and Retention Programs: Final Report" Responsive Management, National Wild Turkey Federation, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

implement strategic, data-driven R3 campaigns.

To assist in capacity building, the Content Workgroup completed a list of recommended actions that should be taken to ensure the successful implementation of most of the strategies contained within this document.

These “Immediate Recommendations for R3 Stakeholders” (page 12) are designed to solidify the framework on which successful R3 efforts are built and pave the way for successful implementation of the Plan. By implementing the recommendations listed below, organizations will be able to:

- Provide common terminology for discussing, comparing and inventorying R3 efforts and results within state and national levels.
- Accentuate the need for organizations to develop or link their R3 campaigns with information technology data collection and analysis infrastructure in order to track participants over time and generate timely analysis of license sales statistics.
- Help decision-makers retool existing R3 programs to effectively prioritize audiences, track participants, apply evaluation tools, and offer participants immediate next steps that keep them engaged throughout their pathway to becoming a hunter or shooting sports participant.

Many of these recommendations should be implemented by all R3 stakeholders: state fish and wildlife agencies, conservation and shooting sports NGOs, and the outdoor industry. However, some recommendations are specific to only a portion of those stakeholders (in which case, the respective stakeholders most able to implement each recommendation have been suggested).

Finally, the recommendations below are similar to many of the strategies found under the actionable topic, “Improving R3 Strategy and Program Design” (page 16). This redundancy was not intentional; rather, it resulted as a product of two independent processes. The “Improving R3 Strategy and Program Design” strategies were developed as part of the threat analysis process (Appendix A). The recommendations in the following section were developed by the Immediate Recommendations Workgroup which was charged with identifying the most pressing needs in R3 that must be addressed before, or in tandem with, any of the strategies listed in the “Actionable Topics” section (page 15). The parallel results of these two processes emphasize the importance of capacity-building and coordination within an R3 community to the overall success of hunting and shooting sports R3.

Immediate Recommendations for R3 Stakeholders

Recommendation 1: Develop a statewide R3 coordinator position that serves as the state fish and wildlife agency's single point of contact for R3 efforts.

Note: All organizations dedicated to addressing hunting and shooting sports R3 should establish an R3 coordinator staff position or team. However, state fish and wildlife agencies are uniquely positioned to coordinate state-level R3 strategies, and so this recommendation is of particular importance to them.

Implementing Organization: State fish and wildlife agencies.

Actions:

- Coordinate staff efforts throughout the agency to influence customer-facing strategies and efforts related to education and outreach, communications, marketing, licensing, regulations, and access.
- Facilitate partnerships among agency R3 efforts and those of conservation and shooting sports NGOs and outdoor industry partners.

Recommendation 2: Complete the Hunting and Fishing Participation Scorecard⁷ on an annual (or more frequent) basis.

Implementing Organization: State fish and wildlife agencies.

Actions:

- Conduct data reviews of customer purchasing behaviors to provide agency leadership with a better understanding of their organization's customer base and license sales trends through time.
- Identify potential deficiencies in license sales systems that prevent timely access to customer data and license sales trends critical to understating the effect of internal and external R3 efforts.

Recommendation 3: Provide key staff with an understanding of foundational R3 concepts using the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model (ORAM) and the Hunter and Angler Customer Journey.⁸

Implementing Organizations: All R3 stakeholders.

7 See Appendix B at nationalR3plan.com

8 See Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model at nationalR3plan.com

Actions:

- Provide the R3 community with consistent language, definitions, and models for customer recruitment, retention, and reactivation efforts.
- Develop a master list of existing R3 programs including goals, objectives and evaluations for each program.
- Map programs within the ORAM to identify how well the organization's R3 strategies are aligned with outcomes that are appropriate with each stage of the ORAM.
- Identify gaps in R3 efforts and determine how to improve connectivity to move participants from left to right along the ORAM.
- Provide customer touch points (such as awareness campaigns, social media, digital resources, hands-on and self-learning tools and license sales systems) to maintain engagement throughout the customer journey.

Recommendation 4: Apply the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) evaluation tools⁹ to all current R3 programs.

Implementing Organizations: All R3 stakeholders.

Actions:

- Provide key staff with training on the WMI evaluation tools.
- Develop criteria for prioritizing which audiences to target and establish outcomes by which success will be measured .
- Determine acceptable return-on-investment for efforts.
- Determine program effectiveness through pre-, post- and follow-up surveys.
- Implement participant feedback processes into all programs.
- Identify specific steps to improve program delivery and content so that participant needs **are met.**

Recommendation 5: Communicate with agency, conservation and shooting sports NGOs, and outdoor industry partners the need for integrated R3 efforts.

Implementing Organizations: All R3 stakeholders; with leadership by the relevant state fish and wildlife agency.

Actions:

- Catalog all potential R3 partners in the relevant state or region, including conservation and shooting sports organizations, retailers, and manufacturers. Coordinate an R3 summit with these partners to begin implementing the strategies contained within this document.
- Dedicate financial resources and identify partners to begin conducting events or targeted efforts that fill critical information gaps and provide participants with immediate next steps and follow-up resources.

Recommendation 6: Encourage adaptive change within organizational management structure whereby the functions and responsibilities of R3 activities are embedded in work duties across programs and beyond those of R3 specialists.

Implementing Organizations: All R3 stakeholders.

Actions:

- Dedicate financial resources for online event planning and management, tracking unique users, surveying, and license sales trends or other indicators of participation.
- Within each state, institutionalize the expectation that all R3 events incorporate: a) participant tracking systems b) next steps for participants post-event, and c) follow-up contact with participants to determine their needs, barriers, or interest in continued participation.

Actionable Topics

Strategies to Increase and Support Hunting and Shooting Sports Participation

The strategies, actions, and recommendations included in this section were developed by the National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan Content Workgroup. This team of experts spent more than nine months defining and refining the barriers or threats that may be preventing hunting and shooting sports participation. Once these threats were identified and vetted, the workgroup identified sets of strategies that should be implemented to counteract the threats.

In order to catalog the large amount of information generated during this process, the Content Workgroup first organized strategies and the threats they targeted into spreadsheets (Appendix C). However, due to the spreadsheets' complexity and detail, their content is best suited for use by R3 program implementation staff. Their format does not easily convey a strategic framework whereby administrators or leadership teams can identify the strategies or outcomes most important for their organization to pursue.

In order to increase the usefulness of the large volume of strategies listed within the threat spreadsheets to R3 planners and administrators, the Content Workgroup categorized all strategies into actionable topics. These topics emerged after the workgroup categorized the strategies according to similarity in focus and outcome. After the topics were identified, the group identified the strategies within each topic that were the most critical to implement first. These top-priority strategies include brief descriptions and contain action items and additional strategies critical to their successful implementation.

The corresponding threat spreadsheet for each strategy in this section is noted in parentheses, allowing R3 staff to locate the associated information (such as midterm outcomes, actions, and indicators of success) critical to the strategy's successful implementation.

This section, as with all sections of the Plan, is part of a living document. As the R3 community's capacity and infrastructure increase, and as priority strategies are piloted, other strategies will be developed or become priorities over time.

Finally, the Content Workgroup advises users of this plan that:

- All strategies listed within the “Actionable Topics” section are important steps to addressing the threats they target;
- The Content Workgroup does not endorse any one method to implement a strategy;
- Each R3 stakeholder should develop their own tailored approach to using the strategies and actions presented; this is a strategic plan, not a prescriptive plan;
- Each R3 stakeholder is encouraged to adopt an applied research approach and an adaptive

management process through which efforts are viewed as experimental learning opportunities to measure outcomes, improve content and increase effectiveness; and

- This plan was designed, and is intended to be, a living document that will undergo continuous modification and improvement. The frequency of future revisions will depend on how quickly and completely the recommendations contained in the Plan are applied, how well adaptive implementation is integrated, and how committed stakeholders are to sharing their results with the R3 community.

I. Improving R3 Strategy and Program Design

Organizational Capacity Building

Hunting and shooting sports R3 programs require a substantial amount of inter- and intra-organizational coordination and cooperation. Although past assessments of R3 programs have indicated that the resources and partnerships needed to produce effective R3 efforts are spread across numerous organizations, agencies, and jurisdictions, the need for coordination among stakeholders has gone largely unrecognized by the organizations striving to sustain hunting and shooting sports participants. The need to link individual customer tracking systems, a progression of skills and knowledge training, access to self learning tools, continual mentoring, and many other resources is the most pressing challenge facing the R3 community at this time.

In order to begin implementing the diverse array of strategies, programs, and efforts identified in this document, the administrative and coordination capacity of agencies, NGOs, and industry must be increased in a targeted and strategic manner. Without this capacity- and partnership-building, individual R3 efforts will likely result in less effective and inefficient use of resources, duplication of efforts, and unclear or meaningless outcomes.

Priority strategies for building the required capacity of the R3 community are:

1. An internal R3 workgroup is established within agencies or organizations for the purpose of integrating R3 throughout the organization's mission and culture. (R3 Community)

This group should contain the staff necessary to provide expertise on hunter and shooting sports participant needs; license (or customer-tracking) systems; license and regulation structure; marketing and communication; hunting and shooting sports education and training; human dimension science; education program design; and program evaluation. This group should also include members of the organizational leadership team to ensure R3 efforts achieve and maintain full organizational support.

To ensure coordination of this group internally and externally, organizations should appoint or hire an R3 program coordinator to facilitate efforts. (R3 Community)

2. Develop guidelines for R3 funding or grant-application processes that award funding only to

applicants with proposals that include program results chains, measurable objectives, and mechanisms to track ultimate outcomes. (R3 Community)

Previous assessments of R3 efforts¹⁰ have shown that millions of dollars are directed annually to programs with poorly defined strategies, untargeted audiences, no measurable or meaningful objectives, and no plans for identifying or tracking ultimate outcomes. Granting organizations must redesign their request for proposals to support selection only of R3 strategies that plan, test, measure, and adapt their actions.

3. Research, design, implement, and evaluate programs to create effective mentors that support hunting and shooting sports programs and participants. (Lack of Instructors)

- Additional strategies for building capacity of the R3 community are to:
- Create multiple-contact, long-term mentoring programs for the full spectrum of hunting- and shooting sports-related activities. (Lack of Instructors)
- Enact or expand temporary hunter education deferral programs (this might include apprentice license programs, multiyear options, programs for all first-time hunters regardless of age, and programs promoting hunting of multiple game species). (Hunter Education)
- Partner with sportsmen's caucuses to draft and pass federal and state legislation to replace the use of social security numbers with an alternative customer identification number. (Regulations)

Strategic and Coordinated Program Development

It has been well-documented in human dimension and leisure science research that becoming a hunting or shooting sports participant is a time- and interaction-intensive process.¹¹ Organizations working to increase the number of hunting and shooting sports participants are only just beginning to realize the significance of that process for the success of their R3 efforts.

Programs, strategies, and events are likely to deliver poor return on investment if they are not designed to target specific gaps in their chosen audience's process of becoming a participant. Likewise, if efforts addressing early-process gaps are not linked to efforts addressing later-process gaps (Appendix A), program managers are unlikely to achieve the ultimate result of creating avid hunters or target shooters.

Priority strategies for strategic and coordinated program development include:

10 See Resource Allocation Survey at <http://CAHSS.org>

11 National Shooting Sports Foundation, 2009. "Best Practices Workbook for Hunting and Shooting Recruitment and Retention."

1. Using the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model¹², organizations review their R3 programs to identify gaps in their efforts and create strategies to link programs in a way that will complete learning pathways for new hunters and shooting sports participants. (Existing R3 Strategies)

Defining and identifying effective R3 programs is a critical first step for organizations invested in sustaining and increasing hunters and shooting sports participants. Frequently, organizational R3 efforts are entangled with information and education programs that are not, by design, intended to create new participants. This confusion leads to an unlinked patchwork of R3 efforts. Without logical linkages, individual programs cannot successfully support an overall strategy of providing participants with a progression of resources to move past the trial stages of their hunting or shooting sports activities. Organizations need to map their respective R3 efforts' scope of influence onto an individual's process (pathway) toward becoming an avid participant. Organizations should participate in a workgroup with other R3 partners and stakeholders in their region and perform the effort-mapping exercise along the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model to reveal program gaps and identify opportunities to close those gaps by partnering with other efforts. (R3 Community)

A particular objective of this process should be the identification of participant touch points. These are steps in a specific participant's or customer's activity progression where they are in most need of an interaction, information resource, skill or knowledge set, etc. (Existing R3 Strategies)

2. Use an adaptive, outcome-based approach to design, pilot, and evaluate all R3 efforts (such as programs, events, information resources, discounted licenses, and special seasons). (Lack of Resources)

Critical elements of this approach include:

- Targeting a specific audience. (Lack of Resources)
- Conducting focus groups or market research on the specific targeted audience's interest level, size, preferred communication methods, needs, and barriers to participation. (Lack of Resources)
- Specific, measurable outcomes are identified at the outset of the program design and development process. (New Programs)
- Measured results that are evaluated, documented, and incorporated into the next program iteration. (New Programs)

Additional strategies for coordinated program development are to:

12 See Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model at nationalR3plan.com

- Compile an inventory of documented results from existing R3 efforts to identify successful elements that can be used to improve current programs and design future programs. (Lack of Resources)
- Expand current programs to include successful elements that target nontraditional groups. (Lack of Resources)
- Offer hunting R3 programs during convenient times for participants and which allow ample time to prepare before the hunting season begins. (New Programs)
- Create multiple-contact, long-term mentoring programs along the full spectrum of hunting- and shooting-sports-related activities. (Lack of Instructors)

Program Assessment and Improvement

Largely absent among individual and national R3 efforts is the application of an applied-research approach to target, pilot, and improve new programs or redesign and adapt existing efforts.¹³ This has resulted in unknown and likely limited program effectiveness and an overall lack of innovative ideas that are essential to the growth of hunting and shooting sport participant populations.

The priority strategy for R3 program improvement and assessment is:

1. Agencies/organizations develop and use effective evaluation tools. (New Programs)

One of the primary challenges facing organizations in designing and conducting successful R3 programs is the absence of defensible and outcome-specific data from past R3 efforts. Evaluating current and future efforts is a critical first step in determining which elements of R3 strategies are the most effective, efficient, and scalable.

Integral to all R3 efforts should be a set of measurable objectives and ultimate outcomes that guide design of an evaluation system to document the effort's effect on hunting or shooting sports populations, and identify areas for improvement.

With data collection systems in place, the R3 community can begin to:

- Develop and test innovative pilot efforts that are scalable to large audiences.
- Fund applied, original research to better inform implementation of R3 interventions, particularly for projects for which there is currently little information. Examples include how to reach underrepresented audiences, recruit and train mentors, and create and disseminate self-learning tools.

II. Improving Sources of Information for New Participants

Credible, accurate, and easily accessible information is critical to hunting and shooting sports participants at all stages of their participant pathway. Developing and improving their skills and knowledge is vital to sustaining their motivation to participate. For many participants, particularly adult learners, self-learning tools are more effective than classroom-style instruction for fostering engagement. Although numerous how-to resources are available, they generally cater to experienced participants who already understand the basics of hunting or the shooting sports. Few online and mobile-friendly learning tools have been developed for novices, and focus-group feedback reveals novice-friendly learning tools can be difficult to find.

Having information that is easily accessible (such as online or in mobile-friendly formats) allows participants to direct and control their learning, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of R3 efforts.

The priority strategy for improving sources of information for new participants is to:

1. Find, promote, and — if necessary — create high-quality, targeted, effective, and comprehensive self-learning tools for the full spectrum of hunters and shooting sports participants, with an emphasis on novices. (Lack of Tools)

This strategy's first step is to review and assess existing resources, and use the results to develop new products that specifically target gaps in the available market of tools and resources. Information should be available along a full spectrum of formats (such as written, online, video, and mobile-friendly). In addition, resources should not be limited to how-to, but also include next steps, where to go, minimum equipment necessary, how-to obtain licenses and permits and other identified information resource needs. (Lack of Tools, New Programs, Places to Hunt, Regulations)

As resources addressing where to go and next steps are developed, it will be critical to place them in a virtual marketplace so participants of all skill levels (including current hunters and shooting sports participants) can easily find hunting and target shooting opportunities. A marketplace approach will also allow providers to more efficiently promote the resources they have developed. (Places to Hunt)

These collaborative efforts will likely require an increase in financial and administrative support from participating organizations for developing material and technology and reconfiguring delivery methods. (Lack of Tools)

Additional strategies for improving sources of information for new participants are to:

- Promote existing hunting and shooting sports opportunities. (Places to Hunt)
- Develop marketing and outreach campaigns to promote hunting on public lands. (Places to Hunt)

- Create resources (such as FAQs, call-in centers and online chat centers) to help potential participants navigate through the hunting regulations and application processes. (Regulations)

III. Improving Skills and Training for Participants

A corollary to the strategies listed under the “Improving Sources of Information for New Participants” (page 20) actionable topic is delivery of information necessary for a person to become a hunter or shooting sports participant or increase their participation. While self-learning tools are a vital resource for many participants, hands-on and person-to-person training programs are a critical component to many individuals’ learning processes. For novices, the skills and knowledge required to become proficient and confident in hunting and the shooting sports can be intimidating and difficult-to-learn without quality in-person instruction. For many audiences, R3 skills and knowledge programs become a substitute for qualified friends, family, or mentors who have traditionally facilitated learning and hands-on experiences.

Priority strategies for improving skills and training for participants are:

1. Identify specific, measurable outcomes at the outset of the program design and development process. (New Programs)

As the first step in designing an R3 program or effort, administrators should identify the skills, knowledge, or learning outcomes that their particular target audience needs in order to advance along the pathway to becoming an avid hunter or shooting sports enthusiast (i.e., moving from left to right along the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model¹⁴). Identifying learning outcomes at the outset of program development will greatly improve program effectiveness, provide a framework for measuring objectives, and allow program managers to document how well the information was conveyed by instructors and received by participants. Evaluation and participant feedback mechanisms are crucial to understanding the changing needs of participants and improving programs and efforts over time. (New Programs)

2. Create effective training courses for hunting and shooting sports instructors, coaches and mentors. (Lack of Instructors)

The current pool of R3 instructors puts forth a tremendous effort in teaching and training new hunting and shooting sports participants. Although many are experts in hunting or a particular shooting sports discipline, very few have had formal instructor or mentor training. Most current instructors would benefit from some level of instructional training to improve their skills- and knowledge-delivery methods as well as to enhance their ability to interact with a variety of audiences.

Note: The skills and time commitment required to become a qualified instructor are different than those necessary to become a coach or a mentor. True mentoring (assisting a person through

14 See Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model at nationalR3plan.com

all of the steps identified in the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model¹⁵) requires numerous contacts with the apprentice over an extended period of time. Coaches and mentors require more extensive training and support programs. (Lack of Instructors)

3. Direct program participants to additional hands-on training opportunities that further their skills, knowledge, and ability to engage in the activity. (New Programs)

A critical element of the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model is that participants are directed to next steps after every R3 interaction. Many of the skills and much of the knowledge needed to motivate participants to become long-term hunters or shooting sports enthusiasts are often best delivered through in-person training sessions.

For socially motivated target audiences such as families, women, and young adults, the most successful learning opportunities incorporate and facilitate social support critical to the long-term participation of these audiences. (Lack of Resources)

Additional strategies for improving skills and training for participants are to:

- Develop effective tools for and expand existing family-friendly and family-focused opportunities among hunting and shooting sports programs. (Lack of Resources)
- Find, promote, and — if necessary — create high quality, targeted, effective and comprehensive self-learning tools for the full spectrum of hunters and shooting sports participants, with an emphasis on novices. (Lack of Tools)
- Develop a best practices guide for R3 and information technology staff. (New Programs)
- Direct program participants to multiple resources that further their comprehension, learning, and ability to engage in the activity. (New Programs)
- Enact, or expand, online hunter education program options. (Hunter Education)
- Enhance hunter education field days to increase efficiency and convenience. (Hunter Education)
- Develop commercially available options for providing hunter education. (Hunter Education)
- Develop a process to recognize and validate core hunting skills and knowledge acquired through experience or mentor-training. (Hunter Education)
- Develop incentives to encourage existing and highly effective volunteers to teach additional hunter education programs. (Hunter Education)
- Develop a screening process that separates applicants seeking hunter education from those seeking only shooting sports or firearms safety education. (Hunter Education)

15 See Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model at nationalR3plan.com

IV. Improving Shooting Sports Facilities and Increasing Access to Hunting and Shooting Sports Areas

Shooting Sports Facilities and Access

Surveys of shooting sports enthusiasts indicate that not having a place to go is often the reason why participation diminishes or ceases.¹⁶ Increasing the number of accessible ranges as well as promoting existing ranges will become more critical to shooting sports participation as the U.S. population continues to grow and become more urbanized.

Increasing access to places to target shoot is critical to sustaining both shooting sports R3 programs and hunting R3 programs. Feedback from participant focus groups indicates that firearm or archery safety is important for individuals to master before other R3 interactions can be effective. Additionally, tailored range facilities and activities that create and emphasize the recreational (fun) value of the shooting sports can motivate some participants to continue their participation.

New, expanded, and user-friendly ranges must be developed in order to foster local and national R3 efforts.

The priority strategies identified for improving shooting sports facilities and access are:

- 1. Conduct state-level shooting range inventories and needs assessments and draft a plan to develop ranges (and specific types of ranges) where a need is identified. (Places to shoot)**
- 2. Develop new facilities appealing to new shooting sports participants and families. (Lack of Instructors)**

Conducting state-level shooting range inventories and needs assessments should reveal the types of ranges needed and their potential locations. Consideration of the types of ranges needed should be as broad as possible and incorporate everything from unstaffed, small-community ranges with only a few shooting points (micro-ranges) to large, destination-type range complexes. Range inventories should also assess the quality of each for its appeal and function to its primary target audience (such as family, new, nontraditional, or experienced participants).

Inventorying, identifying, and developing additional places to shoot will likely require increased funding for shooting range development and management. A successful recommended needs assessment will include consideration of a broad array of diverse range types, and should include shooting sports educational facilities. State agencies will also likely need to identify an individual to lead their shooting range development efforts. (Places to Shoot)

- 3. Conduct a situation analysis to identify public lands that do not provide adequate shooting opportunities and identify the barriers that prevent them from permitting adequate hunting**

16 Duda, Mark Damian, Martin F. Jones, and Andrea Criscione. 2010. "The Sportsman's Voice: Hunting and Fishing in America."

or shooting sports opportunities. (Public Land Management)

Conducting this analysis will require strengthening existing (and, perhaps, forging new) partnerships with public land managers. In addition, the analysis will likely require that range design and management guidelines are updated to include all shooting sports activities, including dispersed target shooting sites. It may also be necessary to create educational and awareness material to increase user compliance with range rules. (Public Land Management, Places to Shoot)

Additional strategies for improving shooting sports facilities are to:

- Conduct research on the motivations of those who use dispersed or informal shooting sports areas, and use the information to develop programs that reduce conflicts with other users. (Places to Shoot)
- Review and revise (if possible) the permitting and renewal process to build or diversify shooting ranges on public lands. (Places to Shoot)
- Develop training material for existing shooting sports participants to become advocates for additional or improved ranges. (Places to Shoot)
- Develop agency, NGO and industry partnerships to identify and secure novel funding sources for range development. (Places to Shoot)
- Develop and make available to state agency and NGO staff a team of shooting range consultants (such as NRA's Range Technical Team Assistance program). (Places to Shoot)
- Expand shooting range and site adoption programs through partnerships among agencies and local shooting sports participants. (Places to Shoot)
- Create incentives for ranges to improve their appearance and customer service (such as the National Shooting Sports Foundation's Five Star Rating Program). (Places to Shoot)
- Update range design and management guidelines to include all shooting sports activities. (Places to Shoot)
- Enact laws to protect designated ranges. (Places to Shoot)
- Review existing range protection laws to determine if they are impediments to operational and design improvements without putting ranges at risk of losing existing protection. (Places to Shoot)
- Develop a program or incentives for local shooting sports participants to adopt dispersed or informal shooting areas. (Places to Shoot)
- Work with local, state, and federal administrators to develop a policy to mitigate any loss of

shooting sports opportunities on public lands. (Places to Shoot)

- Support legislation, advocacy, ballot initiatives, and other efforts, where appropriate, to create hunting and shooting sports opportunities. (Acceptance from Administrators)

Hunting Access

As with shooting sports participants, “no place to go” is often cited in surveys of hunters as a primary reason they reduced or stopped their participation.¹⁷ Unfortunately, it is unclear if “no place to go” indicates an actual loss of access or an element of inconvenience participants are no longer willing to accept. Additionally, “no place to go” may indicate a lack of knowledge about how to find hunting areas.

The following priority strategies largely address access to public lands because, compared to access on private lands, more can likely be done to increase its use for more participants in the short term. However, private land access strategies can be found in the “Additional Strategies” section that follows.

Note: The Content Workgroup recognized that creating and enhancing productive habitat for game species, as well as other wildlife, on public lands is critical to supporting R3 efforts. Without sufficient opportunities to harvest an animal, hunting access has little importance. However, issues of wildlife population and habitat management are beyond the scope of this Plan. Nonetheless, the Plan’s developers strongly encourage the hunting, shooting sports and R3 communities to actively engage in efforts to ensure that abundant, huntable wildlife populations are available to an appropriate population of hunters.

The priority strategies identified for hunting access are:

1. Conduct a situation analysis to identify public lands that do not provide adequate hunting opportunities and identify the barriers that prevent land managers from permitting adequate hunting opportunities. (Public Land Management)

For hunting access, a successful situation analysis will primarily focus on providing physical access to public lands. In many situations, private lands may impede this access. A partial solution to this situation is to identify or convert all boundaries of public lands and private lands leased to provide public access to an open-standard database format (such as Open Street Maps, www.openstreetmaps.com), so accurate maps can be made easily accessible. (Open Standards)

2. State agencies and conservation or shooting sports NGOs develop programs to provide controlled public hunting access to private lands, especially near urban/suburban areas. (Places to Hunt)

17 Duda, Mark Damian, Martin F. Jones, and Andrea Criscione. 2010. “The Sportsman’s Voice: Hunting and Fishing in America.”

Implementing this strategy may require the R3 community to work with policymakers to review and update state public-access incentive and trespass laws, and/or draft or revise local regulations to support hunting and allow (or remove prohibitions on) discharging firearms. (Places to Hunt)

In addition, the R3 community may consider creating partnerships with existing hunting clubs or leases to encourage them to allow increased hunting of underutilized species (such as squirrel and rabbit) and facilitate the development of a virtual marketplace through which participants of all skill levels can easily find hunting opportunities and providers can easily promote them. (Places to Hunt)

Additional strategies for increasing access to hunting areas are to:

- Develop marketing and outreach campaigns to promote hunting on public lands. (Places to Hunt)
- Create novice hunter opportunities (for all ages, not just youth) that improve novice participation rates (such as novice-only seasons, increased permit draw odds for novices, increasing permit and license availability). (Inability to Obtain Permits)
- Promote to novice hunters small game or other underutilized game species with liberal or unlimited license allocations. (Inability to Obtain Permits)
- Support legislation, advocacy, ballot initiatives, and other efforts, where appropriate, to create hunting and shooting sports opportunities. (Acceptance From Administrators)

V. Improving Planning and Cooperation Among R3 Partners

Information sharing and interorganizational cooperation are hallmarks of successful large-scale strategic initiatives. Leveraging resources, sharing successes and failures, and providing a forum for professional interaction are elements critical to the implementation of any local or national R3 strategic plan.

Currently, these elements are not readily available to R3 professionals. Although significant gains have been made at annual or semiannual national symposia, conferences, and regional meetings of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, consistent state, regional, and national cooperation among R3 stakeholders has yet to be established.

Increased collaboration would benefit R3 efforts on multiple scales. Local or state efforts would likely become more effective and increase their beneficial effects if all local stakeholders (such as community organizations, shooting sports clubs, sportsmen's and conservation organizations, and sporting goods stores) were aware of and invited to partner on the R3 efforts underway in their area. Given that the majority of the threats to hunters and the shooting sports are common throughout the U.S., communication about and cooperation with R3 efforts at a national scale would likely increase the cumu-

lative effect of R3 strategy implementation.

Priority strategies for improving planning and cooperation among R3 partners are:

1. R3 partners pool knowledge and share resources for all R3 efforts. (Lack of Resources)

In order to begin identifying and documenting the efficiency, effectiveness, and ultimate effects of various R3 efforts, organizations and individuals implementing R3 strategies need appropriate communication methods by which to share their results. Sharing information, particularly the results of specific R3 efforts, needs to occur through communication systems that are available to local and national stakeholders. To be effective, information-sharing systems must facilitate the communication of R3 efforts and ideas among the strategy implementers and the larger hunting and shooting sports community. (R3 Community)

2. Stakeholders create partnerships to enhance individual efforts, increase program effectiveness and enhance their ability to track participants. (R3 Community)

Few, if any, organizations or agencies implementing R3 strategies have the capacity to provide the number of interactions necessary to lead individuals from their first trial in hunting or the shooting sports to ultimate adoption of the activity. To be successful, R3 implementers should partner with external stakeholder groups which can provide additional or continued interactions needed to allow new participants to progress along the spectrum toward adoption of hunting or shooting sports. By linking multiple R3 efforts across various organizations into a single pathway, new participants can move from one program to the next, and successfully acquire the skills, knowledge, and social support they need to become long-term participants.

If agencies, NGOs and industry can successfully link their information resources, multiple organizations will share the responsibility of shepherding participants through the entire adoption process, and each R3 effort will likely increase its ultimate effect. (Lack of Self-Learning Tools)

Additional strategies for improving planning and cooperation among R3 partners are to:

- Stakeholders establish a clearinghouse for R3 research efforts. (R3 Community)
- Develop a plan to engage the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council and Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation in R3 efforts and address the need for federal agencies to be actively involved in R3 efforts. (Public Land Management)
- Create and support a coalition among agencies, NGOs and industry to influence all public land planning processes. (Public Land Management)
- Create additional partnerships between public land agencies, NGOs and state wildlife agencies to manage dispersed or informal shooting areas on public lands. (Public Land Management)

- Create a committee within the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to identify and recommend open standards for databases of interest to the R3 community. (Open Standards)
- Develop or expand training and awareness programs for members of the mainstream media to improve their understanding of the skills and knowledge needed to participate in hunting and the shooting sports, as well as these activities' benefits. (Strategic Communications with Media)
- Develop information packets for the outdoors media based on the strategies outlined in the National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan. (Strategic Communications with Media)

VI. Engaging Current Hunters and Shooting Sports Participants

Many R3 strategies have focused on the recruitment and retention of new participants. However, there is a significant need to engage current hunters and recreational shooters to keep them invested and active participants.

The process of becoming and remaining a hunter or recreational shooter is, at its heart, an apprenticeship process best facilitated by a knowledgeable and trusted mentor or social network.¹⁸ All participants, regardless of experience level, benefit from continued interactions with peers, supporters and fellow advocates. Facilitating this environment and energizing its supporters is a critical, but generally overlooked, step toward ensuring the ongoing heritage of hunting and the shooting sports.

To be successful, R3 administrators will need to develop and employ additional strategies to not only retain current participants, but also leverage the immense resources available through current participants' experience and commitment to their sport. As R3 administrators develop and scale-up R3 efforts, they need existing hunters and recreational shooters to help implement programs and provide the required training, mentorship, and resources for successful implementation. Recruiting current participants will not only improve R3 program delivery, but may also provide the additional motivation and encouragement lapsed participants need to re-engage in their activities.

Priority strategies for engaging current hunters and shooting sports participants are to:

1. Communicate with existing hunters and shooting sports participants about the critical need for instructors, coaches, and mentors. (Lack of Instructors)

One of the primary challenges facing many R3 efforts is a shortage of qualified instructors, coaches, and mentors. To become an avid hunter or recreational shooter, an individual needs numerous opportunities to assimilate knowledge and skills.¹⁹ As a result, the majority of R3 programs currently incorporate a process that teaches participants basic knowledge and skills in

18 National Shooting Sports Foundation, 2009. "Best Practices Workbook for Hunting and Shooting Recruitment and Retention."

19 See Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model at nationalR3plan.com

order to increase their motivation to participate in the activity on their own. To accomplish this, well-trained instructors are needed to deliver the proper type and amount of training.

Exacerbating a lack of instructors is a lack of effective training courses for hunting and shooting sports instructors, as well as coaches and mentors. (Lack of Instructors)

To increase the overall effectiveness of R3 programs, instructor, coach, and mentor training programs must be developed in tandem with the strategic implementation of R3 efforts. As part of instructor, coach, and mentor training programs, R3 administrators should consider offering incentive packages for instructors, coaches and mentors to encourage them to participate in a variety of instructional opportunities, including additional hunter education certification options. (Hunter Education)

2. Encourage program participants to join nongovernmental organizations to continue learning and develop a social support structure. (New Programs)

While this strategy may appear to only benefit sportsmen's organizations, clubs, and associations, its implementation would likely result in a much broader outcome. Results of R3 program surveys indicate that new participants are highly motivated to find and join a community of others where they can receive encouragement, further instruction, and extended support.²⁰

Sportsmen's organizations are well-positioned to provide or broaden the hunting and shooting sports community while also creating new opportunities for partnership with agencies or industry. An extended social support structure is strengthened when agencies administrate R3 efforts using volunteers from sportsmen's organizations and organizations that provide membership deals for participants. If industry partners provide discounts or incentives for participants, an expanded suite of resources and support become available to facilitate long-term participation.

Additional strategies for engaging current hunters and shooting sports participants are to:

- Develop communications and outreach programs designed to make all hunters and shooting sports participants aware that they are ambassadors for their respective activity. (Lack of Societal Acceptance)
- Improve hunter and target shooter involvement in regulatory and legislative processes. (Acceptance from Administrators)
- Develop programs to encourage hunters and shooting sports participants to become actively engaged in public land planning processes. (Public Land Management)

20 Responsive Management. 2011. "Effectiveness of Hunting, Shooting, and Fishing Recruitment and Retention Programs: Final Report"

- Develop training material for existing shooting sports participants to become advocates for additional or improved ranges. (Places to Shoot)
- Develop educational and awareness material to increase user compliance with range rules. (Places to Shoot)
- Expand shooting range and site adoption programs through partnerships among agencies and local shooting sports participants. (Places to Shoot)
- Develop a program or incentives for local shooting sports participants to adopt dispersed or informal shooting areas. (Places to Shoot)
- Create partnerships with existing hunting clubs or leases to encourage them to allow additional hunting of under-utilized species (such as squirrel and rabbit). (Places to Hunt)
- Promote to experienced hunters archery or muzzleloading seasons, small game or other under-utilized game species with liberal or unlimited license allocations. (Inability to Obtain Permits)
- Promote special big game hunting opportunities (such as damage hunts) to experienced hunters who did not draw a permit. (Inability to Obtain Permits)
- Enhance the traditional hunting and shooting community's acceptance and understanding of nontraditional audiences to create a more inclusive hunting culture. (Lack of Resources)
- Promote and support existing programs that advocate for the responsible use of public lands by hunters and shooting sports participants (such as "The Respected Access is Open Access" campaign by Tread Lightly). (Public Land Management)

VII. Improving Cultural Acceptance of Hunting and Shooting Sports

Conservative estimates indicate that less than 6 percent of U.S. residents over the age of 18 are hunters, and only 16 percent are active shooting sports participants.²¹ While growth in the shooting sports has been documented over recent years (some estimates claiming that 22 percent of those older than 18 are active shooting sports participants²²), both hunting and recreational shooting are enjoyed by only a minority of the nation's population. The lack of cultural and ethnic diversity among the current population of hunting and shooting sports participants further increases the perception that these activities are not representative of the broader cultural norms shared by the majority of U.S. residents.²³

21 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. "2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation."
 22 Responsive Management. 2015. "Sport Shooting Participation in the United States in 2014."
 23 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. "2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation."

Broad societal attitudes about hunting and the shooting sports likely create disincentives for nontraditional audiences and cultures to perceive hunting and recreational shooting as legitimate and viable activities. If these activities are seen by the American public as relevant only to niche segments of the nation's cultural and ethnic tapestry, an expanded base of hunters and target shooters will be more difficult to obtain.

A precursor to an increase in number and diversity of hunting and shooting sports participants is a broader cultural acceptance of these activities by nonparticipating audiences. If hunting and recreational shooting are seen as safe, legitimate, and culturally relevant activities by a majority of the U.S. public, new and nontraditional audiences may be more willing to participate.

Priority strategies for improving cultural acceptance of hunting and the shooting sports are to:

1. Enhance the traditional hunting and shooting community's acceptance and understanding of nontraditional demographics to create a more inclusive hunting culture. (Lack of Resources)

A review of the summary, evaluation, or survey data available from a number of hunting and shooting sports R3 programs reveals that the majority of the R3 efforts implemented in recent decades have directly or inadvertently targeted the youth of traditional hunting demographics²⁴ (middle-aged whites). Program design, curriculum, and instruction of these efforts generally reflect the values, cultural norms, jargon, and imagery that are relevant primarily to traditional participants, rather than other demographic or ethnic groups. This indicates that agencies, NGOs, industry and existing hunting and shooting sports participants may not understand the varied values, motivations, and cultural expectations held by potential nontraditional participants. Panels and focus groups of millennials, women, and ethnic minorities conducted by several state fish and wildlife agencies and conservation NGOs have shown that these groups may not feel welcome in the hunting and shooting sports culture because it doesn't look like them. Traditional hunters and recreational shooters need to understand changing demographics currently underway in the U.S. If traditional participants can accept these changing demographics and the differing values or motivations held by nontraditional participants, it is likely that new audiences will feel more welcome and may participate more frequently.

2. Research and track public opinion about hunting, hunters, the shooting sports and shooting sports participants, and develop programs and messages directed at targeted audiences based on research results. (Lack of Societal Acceptance)

Although research has identified a range of public opinions related to hunting and the shooting

24 "Hunting Heritage Action Plan Recruitment and Retention Assessment Survey Report," Wildlife Management Institute, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, DJ Case and Associates

sports,²⁵ very few R3 messaging efforts have been initiated to target nontraditional audiences or correct misrepresentations, knowledge gaps, or misconceptions that may exist among the public. A host of programs and marketing campaigns are needed to address these knowledge gaps and misconceptions about hunting and the shooting sports. Messaging efforts should address the information needs of targeted audiences, and be designed and implemented using content, images, and ambassadors that represent the values, culture, and motivations of the intended audience. (Lack of Societal Acceptance)

Examples of these efforts could include the development of policies and messages that address the public's documented concerns about particular types of legal, regulated hunting and shooting sports (such as predator hunting and semi-automatic firearm competitions). Another approach may include offering easy trial, awareness, and introduction events. (Lack of Societal Acceptance)

Note: In general, short introduction programs that are not part of an extended strategy designed to change an audience's behavior are usually very limited in their success. Introductory efforts that provide next steps, however, can be effective elements of an R3 education strategy.

Additional strategies for improving cultural acceptance of hunting and the shooting sports are to:

- Offer shooting sports and hunter education as school activities and recreation program offerings. (Lack of Resources, Lack of Societal Acceptance)
- Develop programs or campaigns that encourage nontraditional participants to consider hunting and the shooting sports as viable recreational activities. (Lack of Resources)
- Link existing programming into family-oriented organizations (such as churches and home-school groups) where participants will have the social support to continue and contribute to broad support. (Lack of Societal Acceptance)
- Promote and support existing programs that advocate for the responsible use of public lands by hunters and shooting sports participants (such as "The Respected Access is Open Access" campaign by Tread Lightly). (Public Land Management)
- Develop a process, fund or program through which hunters and shooting sports participants promptly replace or repair damage caused by hunters and shooting sports participants, reducing others' perception of hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts as destructive. (Lack of Societal Acceptance)

- Develop awareness or training programs and information for public land managers on the benefits of hunting and the shooting sports. (Public Land Management)
- Develop strategies to encourage additional federal agencies to sign the existing “Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Sports Roundtable Memorandum of Understanding.” (Public Land Management)
- Create a dedicated fund for shooting sports participants to promptly repair vandalism related to shooting. (Places to Shoot)
- Work with local decision-makers (such as politicians, school administrators and recreation department directors) to eliminate regulations or policies that restrict hunting and the shooting sports. (Places to Hunt)
- Develop programs to improve public officials’ support of hunting and the shooting sports. (Acceptance from Administrators)
- Implement the tenants of the “Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Sports Roundtable Memorandum of Understanding” among signatory agencies at all levels within the agencies. (Public Land Management)
- Work with local authorities to increase penalties for illegal activities within dispersed or informal shooting areas. (Places to Shoot)
- Work with local authorities to improve the law enforcement presence on informal or dispersed shooting sites. (Places to Shoot)
- Expand the scope of current poaching hotlines to include illegal activities within dispersed or informal shooting areas. (Places to Shoot)
- Develop or expand training/awareness programs for members of the mainstream media to improve their understanding of the skills and knowledge need to participate in hunting and the shooting sports, as well as these activities’ benefits. (Strategic Communications with Media)
- Include mainstream media reporters on contact lists for hunting and shooting sports events. (Strategic Communications with Media)
- Develop information packets for the outdoors media based on the strategies outlined in the National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan. (Strategic Communications with Media)

Appendix A: Development Process and Threat Documents

Development Process

In January 2014, the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports (Council) hosted a planning summit in Denver, Colorado, to determine the level of stakeholder support for the development of a national strategy to increase hunter and recreational shooter participation. Facilitated by the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI), this meeting generated universal support for the project and also laid the foundation for a process that would ultimately lead to the identification of key impediments to hunting and shooting sports participation.

Following the January meeting, a Development Workgroup was established to begin drafting an initial framework that would be used to generate funding and focus for a national strategic planning effort. Co-chaired by the Council and WMI, this workgroup was composed of R3 experts from fish and wildlife management agencies, conservation and shooting sports organizations, outdoors industries, human dimensions science, and popular media. These individuals participated in two in-person meetings and dozens of conference calls during the spring, summer, and fall of 2014 to develop and refine the plan framework.

In November 2014, the Council and WMI released a draft strategic framework titled, “National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan: Strategies for Recruiting, Retaining and Reactivating Hunting and Shooting Sports Participants.” This document outlined the proposed work plan needed to complete a national strategic plan for hunting and shooting sports R3. In addition, the framework provided the needed structure for an Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ Multi-State Conservation Grant proposal that was ultimately awarded funding in fiscal years 2015 and 2016. This funding, along with matching funds awarded by several members of the Council, provided the needed resources for the Development Workgroup to complete the Plan. The initial framework can be found on the R3 Community website at nationalR3plan.com.

Upon receiving funding, the Development Workgroup began drafting preliminary work products for the Plan. Bob Byrne Consulting was hired to manage elements of the project, and the Council and WMI facilitated all efforts. To complete the large volume of work needed to produce a first draft by November 2015, members of the Development Workgroup were re-assigned to three sub-workgroups; the Content Workgroup, the Immediate Recommendations Workgroup, and the Communications Workgroup. During the summer and fall of 2015, these workgroups met twice in-person and participated in weekly (sometimes biweekly) conference calls.

The Content Workgroup was charged with developing the approach and content of the final plan. Using exhaustive research and previous work produced by WMI on indirect threats to hunting and recreational shooting, the workgroup chose to organize the structure of the plan around sets of strategies that could be used to address each threat to hunting and shooting sports R3.

Initially, the threats identified by the Content Workgroup were arranged in two levels: direct threats and indirect threats. This hierarchy can be found in the 2014 initial framework but not the final Plan as it was determined that multiple threat levels only reduced the usability of the strategies (drafted later).

In order to achieve simplicity and thus usability of the final Plan, the Content Workgroup refined and frequently combined threats by conducting a rigorous review of the rationale and justification for the inclusion of each threat. Then, each threat was further reviewed to identify the intermediate steps (called *mid-term outcomes*) necessary to systematically mitigate that threat. Finally, each mid-term outcome was assigned the strategies and actions needed to achieve it. The results of this initial process are contained within 16 spreadsheets accessible in Appendix C at nationalR3plan.com.

These spreadsheets represent the Content Workgroup's core thinking regarding the needs of future R3 efforts. In reviewing the spreadsheets it is important to understand the Plan's ultimate logic hierarchy. While the threat documents are organized in a top-down manner (National Plan, ultimate outcomes, threats, mid-term outcomes, strategies, and actions), they should be read (and thought of) as a series of if/then statements from the bottom-up. For example: If we take Action A, then we can expect to achieve Strategy B. If we achieve Strategy B, then we can expect to achieve Mid-term outcome C, and so forth.

Maintaining this logical structure will help ensure that the R3 community allocates its resources toward activities that are most likely to achieve the greatest effect.

In addition to the Plan's *hierarchy*, each threat spreadsheet contains performance measures or indicators of success and, in many instances, potential/optimal organizational roles for each strategy or action. The potential/optimal organizational roles are the workgroup's assessment of the best way each R3 stakeholder can contribute to the success of the strategy in question. The performance measures or indicators of success provide general direction regarding ways to measure the individual and collective success of a strategy's or action's implementation.

The Content Workgroup recognized that the structure of the spreadsheets does not easily convey a strategic framework whereby administrators or leadership teams can identify the strategies or outcomes most important for their organization to pursue.

In order to increase the usefulness of the large volume of strategies listed within the threat spreadsheets to R3 planners and administrators, the Content Workgroup categorized all strategies into actionable topics. These topics emerged after the workgroup categorized the strategies according to similarity in focus and outcome. After the topics were identified, the group identified the strategies

within each topic that were the most critical to implement first. These top-priority strategies, found in the “Actionable Topics” section of the Plan, include brief descriptions and contain action items and additional strategies critical to their successful implementation.

Appendix C is available at nationalR3plan.com.

