

News

AP Finds the NRA Gave \$7 Million to Hundreds of Schools

Tax records show funds mostly went to competitive grant programs meant to promote shooting sports

By Collin Binkley and
Meghan Hoyer
Associated Press

The National Rifle Association has dramatically increased its funding to schools in recent years amid a national debate over guns and school violence, an Associated Press analysis of tax records has found. But few say they plan to give up the money in the aftermath of the latest mass shooting.

The AP analysis of the NRA Foundation's public tax records finds that about 500 schools received more than \$7.3 million from 2010 through 2016, mostly through competitive grants meant to promote shooting sports. The grants have gone to an array of school programs, including the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, rifle teams, hunting safety courses and agriculture clubs.

In some ways, the grant distribution reflects the nation's deep political divide over guns. Nearly three-quarters of the schools that received grants are in counties that voted for President Donald Trump in the 2016 election, while a quarter are in counties that voted for Democrat Hillary Clinton, according to the AP analysis. Most are in medium-sized counties or rural areas, with few

near major cities.

California received the most in school grants, more than \$1 million, while Florida was a close second.

Florida's Broward County school district is believed to be the first to stop accepting NRA money after a gunman killed 17 people at one of its schools Feb. 14. The teen charged in the shooting had been on a school rifle team that received NRA funding. School officials announced the change Tuesday but declined to comment further.

Denver Public Schools followed on Thursday, saying it won't pursue NRA grants in the fu-

whose JROTC programs received \$33,000, primarily to buy air rifles. "If the NRA wanted to provide air rifles for our ROTC folks in the future, I wouldn't have a problem with that."

The grants awarded to schools are just a small share of the \$61 million the NRA Foundation has given to a variety of local groups since 2010. But it has grown rapidly, increasing nearly fourfold from 2010 to 2014 in what some opponents say is a thinly veiled attempt to recruit the next generation of NRA members.

The NRA Foundation did not return calls seeking comment.

“Whatever I think of the NRA, they’re providing legitimate educational services. If the NRA wanted to provide air rifles for our ROTC folks in the future, I wouldn’t have a problem with that

ture and will turn down several that were to be awarded this year. But officials in many other districts say they have no plans to back away.

“Whatever I think of the NRA, they’re providing legitimate educational services,” said Billy Townsend, a school board member in Florida's Polk County district,

Annual reports from the pro-gun group say its grant program was started in 1992 and raises money through local Friends of NRA chapters. It says half the proceeds from local fundraisers go to local grants and half goes to the national organization. Tax records show roughly \$19 million in grants going



In this March 2 photo, a group of JROTC shooters compete in the prone position during the 2018 New Mexico Junior Olympic Qualifier for sport and precision air rifles at Cibola High School in Albuquerque, N.M., for the chance to compete at the National Junior Olympic Championships in Ohio in June. The National Rifle Association has given more than \$7 million in grants to hundreds of U.S. schools in recent years, typically used for JROTC programs, including \$126,000 given to Albuquerque schools.

to the group's Virginia headquarters in 2015 and in 2016.

Besides schools, other typical recipients include 4-H groups, which have received \$12.2 million since 2010, Boy Scout troops and councils, which received \$4 million, and private gun clubs. Overall, about half the grants go to programs directed at youth.

Grant funding to schools rose sharply in the years after the 2012 shooting at Connecticut's Sandy Hook Elementary School, fueled in part by a new grant program the NRA unrolled to help schools make safe-

ty improvements. Three districts received safety grants totaling \$189,000 in 2014, tax records show, but none appears to have been awarded since then.

Nearly half of the 773 overall school grants have gone to JROTC programs, which put students through a basic military curriculum and offer an array of small competitive clubs, like the rifle team at Broward's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. But JROTC leaders say few students ultimately enlist in the military, and the primary goal is to teach students skills like discipline and leadership.

“The safety that we’re teaching, the good citizenship that we’re teaching here, those are the things you don’t hear about,” said Gunnery Sgt. Jim Flores, a JROTC instructor at Cibola High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. “The majority of people walk out of here awesome young men and women, respectful of authority, things of that nature. Not so much little tin soldiers.”

In some parts of the country, shooting clubs draw the same sort of following as any school sport. Bill Nolte, superintendent of the Haywood County district in North Carolina, says he still shows up at school sportsman's club tournaments even though his son graduated. Starting in sixth grade, students can join the clubs to compete in shooting events, archery and orienteering. For many families, Nolte said, it's just like any other weekend sports event.

“You take your lawn chair and your coffee in a thermos, and do much

like you would do if you were going to a youth soccer or travel basketball or baseball event,” Nolte said, adding that NRA grants have helped buy firearms and ammunition and cover other costs that otherwise would fall to the parents. “We are constantly seeking revenue for sportsman's club just like we do for cheerleading and track.”

Districts that tallied the largest sums of NRA money typically used it for JROTC programs, including \$126,000 given to Albuquerque schools, \$126,000 to Broward County and \$125,000 to Anchorage, Alaska. The most awarded to a single district was \$291,000, given to Roseville schools near Sacramento, California, which say much of the funding went toward ammunition and gear for trap-shooting teams.

Grants are often provided as equipment rather than cash, with schools given rifles, ammunition, safety gear and updates to shooting ranges. Nationally, about \$1.3 million was provided as cash, while \$6 million was provided through equipment, training and other costs.

The data does not include grants smaller than \$5,000 — those do not need to be individually tracked in tax filings.

Ron Severson, superintendent of the Roseville Joint Union High School District, says no parents have raised concerns over the funding, but administrators may reconsider it in the wake of the Florida shooting.



A career you can be proud of.

Being a carpenter isn't just a job. It's a way of life. We're devoted to strengthening the lives of our members with steady work, wealth and personal growth.

We take a stand for our members and all workers. We work together to lead the building industry in safety, training and compensation. We create rich lives for our members and partners.

To learn more about becoming a union carpenter, go to NWCarpenters.org.

PORTLAND:
1636 East Burnside, Portland, OR 97214 | 503.261.1862

HEADQUARTERS:
25120 Pacific Hwy S, #200, Kent, WA 98032 | 253.954.8800

More than 20,000 members in the Pacific Northwest.

Read the rest of this story at
TheSkanner.com