

Section 3: Basic Facts about 4-H Clubs

The 4-H Club - What is it?

A 4-H club consists of 5 or more school-age youth, guided by one or more adult volunteers. The 4-H Club's goal is long-term youth development, which encourages its participants to learn life skills that will help them grow into healthy and productive citizens.

A 4-H club is an informal, educational youth opportunity, which serves as a “hands-on” laboratory for helping youth grow in any or all of the following ways:

- Learning how to make thoughtful decisions
- Developing a zest and skill for lifelong learning
- Learning positive socialization skills by working in a group and as part of a team
- Improving their communication skills
- Learning and using practical technical skills
- Acquiring confidence and a positive attitude toward self
- Enhancing citizenship skills by developing an awareness and involvement in their community
- Developing leadership and teamwork skills
- Exploring possible vocations and careers
- Learning to manage time wisely and set priorities
- Interacting with adults who act as role models and have a positive influence on their lives
- Spending quality time with their parents in a mutually rewarding setting

Types of Clubs

Neighborhood 4-H Clubs are groups of youth (5 or more) that are usually led by parents/guardians. They meet in schools, churches, community centers, or homes to complete a variety of 4H projects throughout the year. With the exception of a few countywide clubs, members are usually from the same community.

4-H School Clubs and After-School 4H Clubs - When 4H curricula are utilized within the classroom during regular school hours or in an after-school program outside of regular school hours the group of children who participate on a regular basis is considered to be a 4-H club. The classroom teacher and/or other resource people who teach the subject matter serve as club leaders.

Sponsored 4-H Clubs - A government agency, religious group or other youth serving organization may sponsor a 4-H club. Sponsored clubs usually meet at the agency's facilities and are led by agency staff (paid and/or volunteer).

Membership Requirements

All youth regardless of gender, race, color, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation or marital status may join 4-H.

Age and grade in school - In New York State 4H membership is limited to children enrolled in kindergarten through youth age 19. Kindergarteners must turn 5 by January 1 of the current 4-H year and teenagers may not enroll or re-enroll if they will turn 19 before January 1st of the new club year (October 1 to September 30).

Independent membership - When circumstances prevent a child from joining a 4H club that child may participate in the 4-H Club Program by enrolling as an independent member. Independent members work on projects of their choice at their own pace with parental or other adult assistance. They are encouraged to participate in county activities.

Minimum size of clubs - In New York State a group must have a membership of 5 or more youth to form or remain as a club. Smaller groups may register youth as independent members.

Volunteer Leaders

Several types of volunteer roles contribute to the leadership of the 4-H Club Program. They include:

Organizational Leader - The organizational leader establishes and maintains a club structure that supports 4-H Youth Development activities for school age youth within a defined area. He/she works with the project leader, activity leader and youth in planning the club program; arranges for meeting facilities; complies with Cornell Cooperative Extension procedures; ensures that all enrollments, program registrations and reports are filled out and turned in to the county 4-H office; keeps the 4-H Educator staff informed about activities, accomplishments and problems. An organizational leader may also act as a project leader.

Project Leader - The project leader provides instruction and guidance to 4-H members when doing a project. The key component of the project leader's role is teaching; the "classroom" is wherever the members meet in order to work on their project(s). Project leaders may also assist with project-related activities on the county level and guide members in the selection of projects and the completion of project reports.

Activity Leader - The activity leader is responsible to help members plan for and participate in one or more specific activities the club has included in its yearly plan. These include such things as community service, public presentation, special celebrations, trips, etc.

Resource Leader - Resource leaders are volunteers who are selected by Cooperative Extension staff to aid, train and work with 4H club leaders or members on a short-term basis. They have a specialization in a certain program area and have undergone training or have completed a certification program. Resource leaders often teach workshops or serve as evaluators at fairs and contests. Some examples of resource leaders are: Master Sewer, Master Gardener or SAREP instructor.

Volunteer Training and Support

Support for each leader is provided by the Cornell Cooperative Extension staff. This support may include personal visits, telephone calls, training workshops, leader's association meetings, manuals, and newsletters. Special equipment may be available on loan for use with certain projects or activities. Additional learning opportunities are available at the district, state, regional and national levels. One such opportunity, the annual Northeast Regional Volunteer Leader's Forum is a great way for leaders to energize, exchange ideas and learn about new programs and projects.

Equal Program Opportunity

Because the 4-H Youth Development Program is a component of the national Cooperative Extension System, which is supported by Federal, State and County funds it is governed by the equal opportunity laws of those three governmental entities. The Cornell Cooperative Extension equal opportunity statement is based on those regulations. 4-H clubs must abide by the standard it sets.

Cornell Cooperative Extension actively affirms equality of program and employment opportunities regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation or marital status.

4-H Club Names

Members and leaders work together to select a name for a new 4H club. Once your club is chartered (see page 3-4) you will not want to change its name. Therefore it is important that the name can stand the test of time - not too trendy or juvenile. So avoid using the names of TV cartoons, situation comedies, singing groups, etc. Also, the name should not imply that its membership is limited to any group protected by equal program opportunity regulations. For example, names such as the 4-H Lads or Lassies, Kings or Queens would be inappropriate.

All 4-H Club names must be approved by the 4-H Office before the club can use it.

4-H Symbolism

4-H Motto - "To Make the Best Better"

This national 4-H Motto should be the objective of each 4-H leader and member.

4-H Slogan - "Learning by Doing"

This is the educational philosophy of the 4-H program. Since young people learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process, 4-H projects are designed to provide "hands-on" experience that is reinforced through group discussion and application - "do - reflect - apply."

4-H Pledge -

“I pledge

My head to clearer thinking, (With right hand lightly touch forehead with fingers)

My heart to greater loyalty, (with right hand placed on chest like you're saying the pledge of allegiance)

My hands to larger service, and (both hands waist high, palms up like a book)

My health to better living for my club, my community, my country and my world”.

4-H Colors -

The 4-H colors are green and white. White symbolizes purity, and green represents life, springtime, and youth.

4-H Club Emblem - *A green four-leaf clover with a white “H” in each leaf*

In 1907 a clover was chosen for the emblem, originally featuring only three leaves representing head, heart, and hands. In 1908 a fourth leaf was added to represent health. Today the 4-H Club Emblem is protected by law and belongs to the Congress of the United States. It is protected under Federal Statue 18USC707.

Clover Usage -

The 4-H clover is officially protected by the United States government. The situations in which it may be used, the manner in which it may be displayed, the text style and colors required for its reproduction are all specified. Given the complexity of the regulations, you should check with a 4-H staff member whenever you want to use the clover in exhibits, promotional materials, etc. Use of the clover on items such as T-shirts, caps, key chains, mugs, pens, etc. must be approved by the appropriate 4H staff member. For routine display of the clover within your local club setting observe these rules of usage:

- The four-leaf clover with stem (in green) and the letter “H” (in white) on each leaflet.
- The stem must curve to the right.
- The 4-H Clover must be given a place of prominence.
- It is not permissible to superimpose any letter, design or object on the 4-H Club Emblem or to materially alter its intended shape.

Please see Appendix A for proper usage.