

# **Section 4: Practical Tips**

## ***Organizing and Conducting a Successful 4-H Club Program***

### **Planning - the Key to Success**

Most 4-H leaders, members and their parents are busy people who are involved in a variety of family, school and community activities. 4-H has much to offer, but busy people must choose those opportunities that best fit their needs and schedules. Planning a yearly calendar (see “Planning a Club Program” below) will help everyone integrate 4-H activities with the rest of their personal commitments. Adults and youth should work together to develop the yearly plan. The older the youth, the greater role they should play in this process. For new clubs, some advance planning will need to be done by the adults to determine resources available and to narrow the options for youth to consider. This generally takes place at the New Club Organizational Meeting.

### **New Club Organizational Meeting**

The Club Organizational Leader will meet with the leaders and parents of the new club to assist in making a series of essential decisions including:

- Meeting site(s).
- Meeting frequency & schedule.
- Parent/guardian involvement in 4-H. (who will help in what ways)
- Selection of a first 4-H project or activity.
- Selection of other 4-H projects (or Cloverbud Activities) from which members will be permitted to choose after members and leaders know one another better and have gained some experience.
- Determination of those countywide 4-H activities in which the club will participate.
- Estimation of the money needed to cover the costs of projects and activities and the proportion of those funds to be provided through club dues, individual member purchases and club fundraising.

### **Planning a Club Program**

An effective planning process will create a well-balanced program and provide 4-H members with opportunities for personal development. Each member should be encouraged to voice his/her interests, goals and opinions. A well-planned program will:

- Provide opportunities for each person to assume responsibility
- Include a variety of activities that address each of the four H’s
- Identify the preparation needed for meetings and events
- Provide for timely communication
- Avoid calendar conflicts

***When and how do we plan?*** Most clubs plan their programs and elect their club officers in September or October. (See page 3-6 for more information about club officers.) Clubs that operate only part of the year need to plan a program as soon as possible in order to complete the project(s) in time.

Start by reviewing your club’s current situation. What have they done in previous years? What are the ages and other characteristics of the members? How many members are there and how many leaders/parents are available?

While the planning method must be suitable to the characteristics of the club, an effective planning process will:

- Give each person a part in the decisions
- Facilitate both cooperation and compromise
- Provide practice of planning skills for members of all ages

In small clubs, the entire membership usually does the planning at a general meeting. In somewhat larger clubs, the newly elected officers and club leaders do the planning. Another successful method, especially for clubs with 25 or more members is to select a program planning committee. The club's president should appoint committees with guidance from the leader. Regardless of the planning method, participation should include club officers, other members of various ages, organizational, project and activity leaders, and parents. The vice president is quite often appointed as chairperson of the planning committee. Tool L-1, "4-H Club Planning Calendar", can be used to think about and record the details of the clubs' plan. The first section of the 4-H Club Calendar is a list of club goals for the year.

**What are goals?** Goals are simply statements of what you want to accomplish - what you want to do, what you want to learn. A goal is like a road map. It helps you decide how to get to where you want to go. Goals have three parts that allow us to measure and check our progress. They are:

- The Action - How
- The Result - What
- The Timetable - When

While members will also have individual goals, club goals should reflect what is important to the group, as a whole. These goals provide the foundation for the rest of the club plan. Club goals should:

- Be realistic and measurable
- Meet the needs and interests of the club members
- Promote cooperation
- Provide individual achievement opportunities
- Promote improvement over last year
- Provide community and service participation

**What will we do to meet these goals?** Once the goals are agreed upon, it is important to survey all club members for specific program ideas. Acceptable methods of surveying include:

- Using a suggestion box
- Writing ideas on large pieces of paper that are taped to walls
- Collages
- Roll call (give idea when name is called)
- Brainstorming

When everyone's ideas have been presented and the group is ready to discuss them it is helpful to have these items handy:

- School calendars
- County 4-H calendar
- 4-H Project lists
- Information about community service and field trip opportunities
- Information about community celebrations, festivals and events

Small clubs may fill in the 4-H Club Planning calendar as they reach agreement on the ideas presented. In larger clubs those who are leading the planning process should review all the ideas, prepare a suggested calendar and present it to the membership at a later meeting. Everyone should be allowed

to ask questions and voice their opinion about the plan. This is when conflicts in schedules and other concerns can be addressed. After the plan has been discussed and revised as needed, the members should vote to approve and adopt it as their yearly 4-H program.

Prior to adopting a plan all participants should be able to say “yes” to the following questions.

- Does the program involve all members?
- Is the program interesting to all ages?
- Is the plan realistic?
- Does the plan include activities for learning and service, and some just for fun?
- Did we consider county 4-H events?
- Is someone responsible for each task?

***How do we ensure that the plan will be followed?*** Through communications and check-ups!

- Provide each family with a 4-H year calendar of club events.
- Announce dates at meetings, in newspapers and by radio.
- Check with subcommittees to see that responsibilities are being carried out.
- Call club members.

***What if the plan isn't working?*** As the year progresses changes may be necessary. You may spot lagging interest, more pressing needs or new opportunities. After several meetings the club should review progress towards goals, discuss new opportunities and, if necessary, amend the club plan.

## **Getting Started**

It is very important to get off to a good start. There is a lot to be accomplished during the first 2 meetings of a new club. Everyone should leave these meetings feeling that they have had a good time, that they understood and contributed to what went on and that they know what will happen next. Therefore, you may want to arrange for a 4-H staff person, experienced leader or 4-H teen to attend these meetings and provide guidance as needed.

**First meeting** - Tasks to be completed at the first meeting include:

- Select a Club Name - Your club's name should be unique within your county, should include “4-H” and should be able to stand the test of time, not trendy or too juvenile to be acceptable as members grow older. (See page 2-3 for rules pertaining to 4-H club names.)
- Learn what the four H's are and what the clover symbolizes
- Learn the 4-H Pledge & Motto
- Learn the responsibilities of club officers and conduct elections (See pages 3-6 and 3-7)
- Start work on a project

**Second meeting** -

- Club officers conduct the club's first business meeting. Teach the basic rules of order as the meeting progresses. (See page 3-7 of this book and pages 4 through 7 of the 4-H Club Secretary's Handbook for more information about business meetings and club officers.)
- If time permits project work can continue after the business meeting.

**Succeeding meetings** - Proceed with project work, meetings and activities according to the club's plan. If questions or difficulties arise contact a 4H staff member or mentor-volunteer as soon as possible. Little difficulties tend to grow and may become unmanageable if not addressed quickly and

appropriately. A little guidance can go a long way in helping to make 4-H club participation a positive experience for all.

**Chartering** - The Club Charter identifies a group as an organized 4-H club that is authorized to use the 4-H name and emblem for educational purposes. ALL Clubs must be chartered. The Charter stays with the club as long as it is in existence. All chartered clubs are expected to operate within the framework of the 4-H program. The charter does not have to be renewed when leaders change or minor revisions are made in the club structure. A charter application should be submitted soon after the club has elected its officers and met the other eligibility requirements. Charter application information can be found on page 1 of the **4-H Club Secretary's Handbook** and the application itself is on page 2 of that book.

## Tips for Conducting Club Meetings

### Structure Meetings Appropriately

The way club meetings are structured depends largely on the size of the group and the age of the members. In general 4-H meetings are divided into 3 segments:

- Business Meeting - through which members learn how to conduct a meeting and practice democratic decision-making. (See pages 3-6 and 3-7 for more information about business meetings and club officers.)
- Educational Program - usually project work, but may involve special presentations or activities conducted by resource people, parents or older members.
- Refreshments and Recreation

The order of these segments and the amount of time devoted to each may be varied to suit the specific activities planned, time and place the meeting is held, etc. Here are some specific suggestions:

1. ***Small groups that meet right after school*** may want to have refreshments available as the members arrive. Quiet recreational activities such as 2-person pencil and paper games can be used to keep order and foster interaction until you are ready to start the meeting.
2. ***When members can't settle down and focus on the task at hand*** a short active game followed by a quiet one can release energy and get the group ready for more "serious business." If the club's recreation leader always comes prepared with at least one active and one quiet game to play these can be led at a time like this rather than at the end of the meeting.
3. While ***cloverbud groups*** do not conduct business meetings, starting each meeting with the same opening ritual establishes a structured routine that is important for this age group. Use of a closing ritual is also recommended. Members can be assigned an "office of the day" to help conduct these rituals. This prepares cloverbuds for future roles as club officers when they become old enough to assume such roles. See Tool CB-1 "4-H Cloverbud Meeting Planner" in the 4-H Cloverbud Leader Handbook.
4. ***The timing of meeting segments*** must relate to both the attention span of the age group and the nature of the activities planned. A cloverbud activity should last no more than 15 to 20 minutes. On the other end of the continuum, older teens can sustain interest for 2 hours or

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more. **But** no activity should be conducted for more than an hour without a break. Look for natural breaks in the activity (such as moving from one step of a process to another, or moving from group discussion to work groups) and use that transition time for refreshments, a quick game, an exercise or social break.

5. ***Sharing club leadership with your members*** makes your job easier and develops life skills in the members. Some children are “natural leaders” but all children can lead when given the opportunity and support. To foster the development of leadership characteristics, group “followers” with followers - a leader will emerge from within this group. Group leaders with leaders - strong personalities will be forced to negotiate. Support both groups with suggestions that relate to group process. Hesitancy to accept leadership often stems from lack of confidence. Help members overcome this by providing both information and encouragement and by assigning leadership tasks that draw on a member’s known strengths, talents and abilities.
6. ***Beyond the three segments*** there are many little things you can do to make your 4-H club meetings fun, educational, extra special - a potpourri of ideas can be found in Tool L-2, Tips for 4-H Meetings.

### **Manage Project Activities for Safety, Efficiency and Effective Learning**

Detailed information about the purpose of 4-H projects and the use of experiential learning methods can be found in Section 5. Here we deal with the practical matters of time, space and organization.

1. ***Become familiar with and follow the Youth Protection Guidelines for Accident Prevention.*** See Tool L-3, CCE Youth Protection Guidelines.
2. ***Be prepared before members arrive.*** Write a lesson plan and know how you will handle transitions between steps or activities. Set up the room and work areas as appropriate for the activity(s). Gather all equipment and supplies and arrange them in the areas where they will be used.
3. ***Help members practice skills before applying them to their own project.*** To save on time and supplies you can set up workstations (one for each skill to be tried) and rotate members through them. Experienced members, teens or parents can be called upon to help during the practice session.
4. ***Prepare members for independent work.*** Instead of answering the question “What do I do next?” ask a member to read the instructions and tell you what they mean. This both reinforces reading skills and builds the member’s confidence in his/her ability to “do it myself.”

Using teaching methods that progress from high to low supervision also readies members for independence. For example, you may demonstrate a process, calling on a different member to do each step as you assist. Next, members might work in teams of 2 or 3 in which one of the members is experienced. Progress to group work with helpers rotating among the groups. Finally, members can work independently, asking for help when they have recognized that they really need it.

## Use the 4-H Business Meeting as a Developmental Tool

In addition to learning the standard procedures for running a meeting, participation in 4-H business meetings helps members:

- Gain experience in planning
- Learn how to make group decisions
- Assume leadership
- Develop a sense of responsibility

But this does not happen automatically; the members must be actively involved in planning and conducting the meeting, rather than simply following a script provided by the leader. The following tips will help you make the business meeting a truly educational experience.

1. ***Elect officers democratically.*** Officers are elected only once each year, unless a vacancy must be filled. It is best to change positions every year so that members have an opportunity to learn and practice the role of several different offices. Before nominations are made review the duties of all officers and stress the importance of selecting people who have the right skills for the job: the secretary should be able to write neatly, the president should be fair to everyone, the treasurer should be good at math, etc.

The duties of 4-H Club Officers can be found on pages 4 and 5 of the 4-H Club Secretary's Handbook. Offices include President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, News Reporter, Song Leader and Recreation Leader. Since it is not wise for a club to have more officers than general members you may either "invent" extra offices such as "refreshment chairman" or "safety officer" giving everyone a job, or use one or more combined offices (Secretary/Treasurer, Vice President/News Reporter, Song and Recreation Leader) to even out the number of officers and general members.

The current president presides over the election of officers starting with nominations. While several methods can be used the most common method is to have nominations made from the floor. The retiring president begins the election process by saying "I now open the floor for nominations for president of our 4-H club. Do I hear a nomination for president?" After one or more people are nominated and no further nominations are heard the president closes the nominations for that office. Voting may take place immediately or after nominations for all offices are completed. Voting can be done by show of hands or by secret ballot.

In a small club in which every member will hold an office it is recommended that the last 2 offices be filled voluntarily - the 2 remaining members deciding between them which office each will assume (guidance from the leader may be needed). This will avoid having the last to be elected feeling unwanted. New clubs in which members do not know one another very well may consider selecting officers on either a voluntary or lottery basis for the first year only. Larger clubs of older members may want to use a committee to nominate a slate of officers.

The 4-H Club Secretary's Handbook and Treasurer's Record Book are available at the 4-H office.

2. ***Ensure that officers receive training.*** Encourage new officers to participate in any officer training program offered by the 4-H office. If none is available meet with them to review the things they need to do before, during and after meetings. Enlist the aid of parents to provide support. Make sure they understand their child's responsibilities and, that they can help best by reminding and checking, not by doing the child's work.

3. **Use an agenda planner.** (See Tool L-4, “The 4-H Business Meeting - Agenda Planner”) Work with the president and secretary to fill in the agenda planner, using the previous meeting’s minutes to identify the old business and any committees that may need to report. The agendas for small clubs of elementary school youth are generally short and simple, so the agenda can be planned a few minutes before other members arrive. These clubs rarely have committees but may assign an individual member to gather information about some activity the club is considering. This member reports as “committee chairman.” In this type of club, information for the “new business” portion of the meeting will most likely come from leaders and parents.

After the president and secretary have planned agendas with you a few times they should be able to do most of it themselves before the meeting day. You will only need to check it over and add the new business when they arrive.

Teens and large clubs of mixed age groups are likely to have more complex agendas and will need to learn some of the finer points of parliamentary procedure.

4. **Use standard rules of order.**
  - a. To maintain order, ask each 4-H member to raise his or her hand to be recognized by the president before speaking. Only one person may speak (“have the floor”) at a time.
  - b. Before the club votes on any suggestion, a member should phrase it in the form of a motion: “I move that the 4-H Earth Buddies help at the town beach clean-up on May 15.” Another member must second the motion (agree to it) before the club discusses it. After everyone has been heard the president takes a vote. A voice vote (yes or no), ballot or show of hands may be used.
  - c. All motions, the names of members who made and seconded them and the result of the vote should be recorded in the minutes. Older members will also record the major discussion points, pro and con so that the club can remember why it decided as it did.
  - d. As clubs become more sophisticated more parliamentary rules can be introduced. The **4-H Clubs Program** booklet available through the National 4-H Council’s Source Book (on the page that says “Meeting Supplies”.) ([www.4-Hmall.org](http://www.4-Hmall.org)) contains a parliamentary procedure chart that you may find useful. (Click on Educational Resources, then click on 4-H Clubs Program.)

### **Use Positive Behavior Management Techniques**

Behavior management, whether exercised by youth themselves (self-discipline and peer influence) or by adult authority starts with a shared understanding of behavioral expectations. While expectations that relate to the health and safety of participants and the values of the organization are nonnegotiable, youth want and need to have an active role in defining limits and establishing the rules that will govern their club. Once established, they want, expect and will support consistent reinforcement of those rules. Here are some tips on where to start and how to both build on and reinforce behavior limits and a set of rules.

1. **Use the 4-H Member’s Code of Conduct** (Tool L-5) to clarify and enforce the nonnegotiable expectations. Discuss the code by asking these questions after each item is read: “What does this mean?, Why do you think this is in the code?, What would happen if members did not follow this rule?”
2. **Discuss ways members can make additional rules.** Connect discussion of club rules to the code of conduct. “The 4-H Member’s Code of Conduct is for all 4-H members in this County.

Do you think our club needs to have any more rules?" If ideas are presented let the club president lead the discussion. Suggestions should be presented as motions and voted upon at the next business meeting. Let members know that they can always discuss rules they feel should be changed or added. Using a suggestion box might be helpful for members who seldom speak up at meetings.

2. ***Eliminate temptation.*** When members are busy and having fun they are not looking for ways to "get in trouble." So, plan ahead to eliminate "down time" - portion out the supplies and arrange equipment before members arrive; ask the recreation leader to bring some puzzles or brain teasers on days when you know some members will finish their activities before the majority of the group; keep ideas in mind of ways members can help each other or tasks that need to be done for the group before the next meeting, etc. As you identify ways that individuals test the rules or push the boundaries think of ways to eliminate the things or situations that create temptation for those individuals.
3. ***Catch 'em doing something good!*** Keep alert for helpfulness, generosity, kindness and other good things your members do and say. Then thank or compliment the member directly but "matter-of-factly" - "Katie, it was very nice of you to show Jim how to..." - While bolstering Katie's self-esteem you are also sending the message to others that the way to get attention is to do something good.
4. ***Do more listening than talking.*** When an individual is acting out or there is conflict between members, those involved are in a heightened emotional state; they can't "hear" what you say. Follow these steps:
  - a. Separate the member(s) from the group (s/he doesn't need witnesses or a jury).
  - b. Calm the situation by speaking softly - have member(s) look at you, not the group.
  - c. Find out what happened but place the emphasis on discovering **why** it happened.
  - d. Create a sense of responsibility without placing blame.
  - e. Help member(s) recognize the potential consequences of the action. Try to use questions - "What would happen if..." - to lead the thought process.
  - f. Help member(s) decide how to handle a similar situation in the future. Again, guide the thought process without prescribing the solution. When children decide for themselves how they should behave they are more able to exercise self-discipline. If you dictate you put yourself in the role of disciplinarian.
5. ***Consult with parents when behavior problems persist.*** Use tact and sensitivity when talking with parents about their children. Here are some do's and don'ts:
  - a. ***Don't*** inform the member(s) that you intend to talk to the parents - it may be taken as a threat.
  - b. ***Do*** request the parent's assistance - " I hope you can help me solve a problem I've been having during 4-H meetings."
  - c. ***Do*** present the facts, but ***don't*** use labels (troublemaker) to describe the child's behavior.
  - d. ***Do*** explain the behavior management techniques you have tried and the child's response.
  - e. ***Don't*** tell the parents what they should do, but ***do*** ask if there is anything they can do to help and if they have any suggestions for you.

## **Use Ceremonies to Build Cohesiveness Among 4-H Members**

Participation in ceremonies produces a sense of kinship among members of an organization (“we believe in the same things and we’re in this together”). Depending on their nature, ceremonies may also foster teamwork, reinforce expectations, proclaim an organization’s values to the general public or provide recognition to members. Four ceremonies commonly used by 4-H clubs are the Installation of Officers, Tool L-6, the New Member Induction, Tool L-7, the Presentation of Colors (flags), Tool L-8, and the 4-H Candle Lighting Ceremony, Tool L-9.

## **Evaluate Meetings Regularly and Take Action When Problems Arise**

After the group has been meeting for 4 to 6 months take a close look at how things are going. First question yourself using Tool L-10, Room to Improve Your 4-H Club Meeting. Have you been doing what it suggests? Next, use Tool L-11, Lesson for Evaluating Your 4-H Meeting and Tool L-12, 4-H Meeting Checklist during one of your regular meetings.

Schedule a special meeting with all leaders, officers and perhaps some parents to summarize and analyze the data. Follow this procedure:

1. Use a clean copy of the checklist to tally "yes" and "no" responses.
2. Based on the responses, answer these questions:
  - Are we providing enough opportunities for individuals to make contributions?
  - Are we making everyone feel good?
  - Are 4-H'ers learning anything?
  - Do we use group involvement strategies in the meeting?
3. Next, decide what can be done to improve meetings? Who will do it?

If you have more "yes" responses than "no" responses you should feel good. "No" responses indicate a need for better planning or implementation of meetings. This process of evaluating the meeting should be done two or three times a year.

Even though every effort has been made to keep things running smoothly, problems will occasionally arise. When they do, it is important to address them as soon as possible, before they get out of hand. The key to effective problem solving is identifying the cause. If you don’t know why the problem exists you are likely to be merely “treating the symptoms” rather than “curing the disease.” Tool L-13, Troubleshooting 4-H Club Problems, describes some common 4H club problems, lists possible causes and suggests alternative solutions.

## **Motivate Members through Positive Reinforcement**

Positive reinforcement is the single most effective tool for motivating youth. It is also very important in discipline. Youth need constant reinforcement for their positive activities. But providing positive reinforcement is not easy. It requires a positive outlook on your part and must be practiced. It comes in two forms: verbal and nonverbal.

When giving positive reinforcement it is important to be specific and sincere. Don’t say “Johnny, you’ve done a good job.” Say specifically what the child did: “Johnny, your carrot cake looks good and tastes great - good job!” Being too general with positive reinforcement may appear artificial or phony.

Unfortunately, most people find it easier to be critical than positive. To overcome this, focus on the strengths and successes (even small ones) of your members. Help them to accept themselves so that they can accept others. Following your lead, they will also learn to give positive feedback to others.

Give positive reinforcement constantly. Here are some simple ways to do it:

- A pat on the shoulder
- Nodding
- A smile
- An enthusiastic and encouraging comment
- Specific verbal praise
- Certificates
- Writing a note home about the progress of group members
- Saying “thank you”
- Letting a group member make a decision
- Asking a group member a question
- Asking a member to demonstrate skills to the rest of the group
- Providing an opportunity for the members to share their skills and projects with the community
- Allowing members to plan and lead group activities

There are literally thousands of ways to show positive reinforcement. As you see the results of your words and actions the importance of positive reinforcement will become quite clear and you will find your own ways to provide it both verbally and nonverbally. In the meantime you can find some more suggestions in Tool L-14, Ways to Say “Good for You”.

### **Involve Parents - “4-H is a family affair.”**

Everyone benefits when parents are involved in the 4-H club program:

- **4-H members** need their own parents’ support and encouragement to attend meetings, complete projects and fulfill responsibilities to the club.
- **Parents** have an opportunity to spend time with their children, and enjoy activities together. In many ways 4-H is a “partner in parenting.”
- **4-H leaders** have a lot to juggle. Being able to delegate some of those responsibilities, even the smallest ones, can be a big help.
- **The community** benefits when families support community-minded organizations like 4-H. Involved families are more knowledgeable about community issues and therefore more likely to support community efforts as well.

Keep these benefits in mind when you invite parents to attend events or to lend a hand - it is in their own best interest to say “yes!” But, how, when and who do you ask? Here are some suggestions:

1. **Meet with parents at the beginning of each year.** This parent meeting may take place before, after or as part of the club’s planning meeting. While members should make the final decisions about their projects and activities it is important to know early in the year the ways in which parents can support the club program. Consider using an interest survey and/or activity sign-up sheet to encourage commitment and to keep track of everyone’s interests and availability. (See sample 4-H Parent Participation Survey, Tool L-15 and Parents Can Help in Our 4-H Club Program, Tool L-16)

2. **Maintain good communications.** In order for parents to feel like a part of the group and that they share responsibility for its success they must be kept informed about the “when, where and why” of both the club’s activities and the 4-H club program in general. Some ways you can stay connected are:
  - a. Ask parents to assist at club meetings on a rotating basis. You may even want to meet in each (or a few) of the members’ homes on a rotating basis.
  - b. Encourage members to ask for their parents help when working on projects at home.
  - c. Send information sheets home with members prior to special activities such as Public Presentation Day. Include information about the purposes of the program - why it is important for their child’s personal development and how they can help their child prepare, as well as the basic facts about time and place.
  - d. Make time to chat with parents whenever they bring their child to a 4-H activity.
3. **Create opportunities to get to know parents better.** For example, hold “parent nights” or “family days” during which members can “show-off” their accomplishments and you can socialize with parents. Learn about their personal interests, hobbies and family activities. Later requests for help can then be based on the things you know they enjoy and can do well.
4. **When you need help:**
  - e. Ask an individual, basing your request on that person’s interests, skills and abilities. Generic calls for help don’t work!
  - f. Be honest and specific about the time commitment and time frame.
  - g. Ask well in advance of when the job needs to be done.
5. **Express your appreciation appropriately.** Regardless of how much or how little a parent has done s/he deserves a “thank you.” Whether that is delivered in the form of a phone call, a hand-written note or public recognition that may include a certificate or small gift, will depend on what was done and the person’s personality - one size does not fit all!

## Involve Junior Leaders

Junior Leaders are 4-H young adults who partner with adults to provide leadership for 4-H clubs and countywide 4-H activities. Depending on age and experience a junior leader can serve as a general assistant, teach a project, mentor individual members, coordinate activities or assume almost any other 4-H leadership role under the supervision of an adult.

Involving junior leaders in your club program not only “lightens the load” for you, it also adds a spark of energy and enthusiasm provides role models for your members and gives the teens a valuable opportunity to practice their leadership skills.

## Communication - an Important Two-way Street

You will be receiving both regularly scheduled communications (such as a 4-H newsletter) and special mailings from the 4-H office. Often they will contain registration instructions for up-coming events. Occasionally they will request information needed by 4-H staff for reporting purposes. The information you provide is important and submitting it on time eliminates the need for duplicate mailings or phone calls that needlessly waste time and money.

Given the busy world we live in, it is very tempting to let our paperwork pile up until we have some “down time” (Does it ever come?). In the end it is usually a lot easier to take it one paper at a time. So please reply to 4-H mailings as soon after they arrive as possible. The following two suggestions will also help to facilitate communications.

1. **Note deadlines.** When you find a form in a 4-H mailing, immediately look for the deadline date and mark a day **at least 2 business days earlier** on your calendar. If you will need to gather information from members or parents and you will be having a club meeting before the deadline, it may be easiest to put this paperwork on the meeting agenda. If not, decide right away when and how you will collect the information you need.
2. **Please call us.** If you are not sure you understand a question on a form or exactly how the information should be recorded, call **the person who sent you the form**. This is not being “pesty” - it is being helpful. Chances are that you are not the only person who is perplexed. Your call alerts the sender that there is a communication problem and provides an opportunity to clear it up for everyone. **Be aware of the schedule.** Certain information will be requested from you at the same time every year and 4-H events that require registration also take place at about the same time each year. Anticipating the arrival of these mailings will help you to gather the needed information in advance. Also, checking up on the whereabouts of a mailing you were expecting to receive but did not, may help you avoid missing an opportunity. Things really do “get lost in the mail” sometimes! The two busiest times for paperwork are the beginning of the school year and the end of the 4-H program year. Be on the look out for:
  - a. **Annual re-enrollment packets** - At the reorganization meeting in September you will receive your re-enrollment packet. Enrollment for existing members is due by December 1. New members will be accepted until May of the following year for participation in the Erie County Fair.
  - b. **Project Reporting** - On your member enrollment form, please indicate what projects you plan to complete in the current 4-H year - i.e. - sewing, woodworking, Public Presentation, Textile Revue.
  - c. **Seal of Achievement application** - Information about the 4-H Club Seal of Achievement and the required form can be found on pages 1 and 2 of the **4-H Club Secretary’s Handbook**. While the application will not come in the mail, the 4-H office may request that it be submitted with other year-end forms. So, look for any mention of it in year-end mailings.