

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 4-H 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. 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 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.