

Section 5: What is a 4-H Project?

Understanding 4-H Project Work

A project is a planned series of learning activities/experiences that engage youth in the use of their *heads* and *hands* in ways that result in enhanced competencies, open *hearts* and better *health*.

4-H projects give youth opportunities to:

- gain new knowledge and develop the critical thinking skills that lead to *independence* of thought and action;
- experience a sense of *belonging* through cooperative learning activities;
- develop a spirit of *generosity* by sharing knowledge and using skills to help others;
- achieve a feeling of *mastery* as the cumulative result of project work. (See pages 1-2 and 1-3)

4-H projects always teach the “why’s” as well as the “how’s.” For example: a member enrolled in a woodworking project might learn the safe and most effective way to use basic hand tools and gain experience in the selection of hardware and finishing materials while making a birdhouse (tangible product). The knowledge and skills learned (intangible product) can be applied when making other wooden items in the future. It is this transferable knowledge and skill that is the essence of the project—not just the finished product.

A project will not always result in a tangible product but may lead solely to an intangible result (for example, learning a CPR technique). In either case a learn-by-doing approach is used. The 4-H “learning by doing” method involves several steps in a process: doing, and then thinking, planning, and often doing again. Such learning is called experiential learning (see the “Experiential Learning Model” on the next page) and is a powerful approach for young people to develop a variety of life skills.

The experiential learning approach starts with a concrete activity—something for us to DO. Following the concrete activity we REFLECT on what we have experienced. Ask the members “what?” questions such as “What happened?” and “What was that like for you?” or “What did you observe?”

Next we need to help the members generalize the concepts formed through this experience so that they can APPLY their learning to future real-life situations. To do this, we first ask “So what?” questions such as “So, what made it easier or harder for you?” and “So what are the key learnings from this activity?”. Finally, we ask, “Now what?” and “Now that I know this, what do I do next?”

Through the experiential learning approach we help young people develop the characteristics and abilities that will allow them to grow into mature, productive and contributing citizens. In the 4-H Youth Development program, such characteristics and abilities are referred to as “Life Skills.”