

4-H Clubs and Groups

The 4-H Club – What is it?

A 4-H Club is an organized group of at least five youth from three different families who meet regularly with adult volunteers or staff for a long-term, progressive series of educational experiences. A club meeting is recommended at least monthly, though research shows 4-H makes a greater positive impact if 4-Hers participate twice a month.

Families, Independent Members, and Others:

For many youth, their exposure to 4-H experiences and learning materials comes through activities conducted either within their family or as independent members. While 4-H encourages participation in club settings to promote friendships and interaction with other youth and adults, for some youth, this is not always possible. Families and independent members are welcome to participate as part of the 4-H experience, however, the IRS and National 4-H Policies prohibit 4-H families or independent members from inclusion under the 4-H General Exemption Number as a tax-exempt entity, and from raising funds for their specific family group or members. Families and independent members are encouraged to participate in county activities.

The Enrollment Process

To enroll, members and their families need to complete the following forms. Identifying information is kept strictly confidential. The Extension Office will not release your information without your permission. We collect these forms once a year at the beginning of your enrollment in order to reduce the amount of paperwork we have to collect the rest of the year.

Members

- Member 4-H Enrollment/Re-Enrollment Forms (includes Member Code of Conduct and Publicity Release)
- Permission Slip/Medical Release Form
- Acknowledgement of Risk Form—4-H Member (for all 4-H members planning to participate in clubs and related activities)
- Membership Fee

Parents

- 4-H Adult Code of Conduct

Volunteers

Volunteer enrollment follows a slightly different process, as outlined in Cornell Cooperative Extension Volunteer Involvement Policy and Procedures. For more information, please contact the Extension Office. This process includes:

- New Volunteer Application (including reference check and criminal background and DMV checks (if applicable))
- Volunteer 4-H Enrollment/ Re-Enrollment Form (including Volunteer Code of Conduct and Publicity Release)

Responsibilities of Parents in a 4-H club

Parents have one of the most important responsibilities in a 4-H club, ensuring that their children have positive experiences as 4-H club members. Since 4-H is a family program, when people join a club, they really sign up as a family. Parents need to look at the 4-H club experience as an opportunity to learn with their children and not just a place to drop them off to run errands. When a member signs up for a project, it is important parents understand that their child has made a commitment to actively participate in the club experience and attend scheduled club meetings and social activities.

4-H Group Names

Members and leaders work together to select a name for a new 4-H group. This name should reflect the unique individual character of the group while presenting a positive image of 4-H to the greater community. It is essential that any additional logo or images used with the 4-H Name and Emblem also reflect this positive image of 4-H.

- Names must be Specific - The selected name should be specific to the individual 4-H club or entity either through a unique name like “Show-n-Grow 4-H Club” or by identifying the community or county location like “Johnson County 4-H Teen Club.”
- Names should not imply Exclusivity - The selected name should not imply that its membership is limited or exclusive to any group. For example, names such as 4-H Lads or 4-H Lassies would be inappropriate.
- Names should not be Overtly Religious - The selected name cannot be overtly religious or represent the beliefs of one denomination over another. 4-H clubs with names like “God’s Children,” or “4-H’ers for Jesus” or “Park

Synagogue 4-H” would be inappropriate. NOTE: Some communities have a historically religious name which through the passage of time has lost the religious connotation. Therefore a 4-H Club might be called the “San Francisco All Stars” and be in compliance with 4-H naming standards.

- Names should not be Offensive - The selected name should showcase 4-H as a positive, safe and open environment for young people. Names which are offensive or generally seen as demeaning to any group or set of individuals protected by equal opportunity regulations are to be avoided. “4-H Mafia” or the “White Knights 4-H Club” would be examples of inappropriate choices.
- Names should foster the Character-Building Purpose of 4-H -The selected name should reflect the positive character-building purposes of the 4-H Program. Consequently, a club or event named after questionable or notorious historical figures such as “Billy the Kid 4-H” or “Jack the Ripper 4-H” would be inappropriate.
- Names should be Sustainable over Time - Once a club is chartered or an event named, it’s unlikely that the name will be changed. Therefore, it is important that the selected name be able to withstand the test of time avoiding being too trendy (e.g., The Bell Bottom Belles) or too juvenile (e.g., Little Clover Kittens).
- Names should comply with Copyright Regulations - Avoid using the names of TV shows, public figures, singing groups, popular products, etc., that may not only enjoy a short-lived popularity, but may also be a copyright violation of a commercial name.

Chartering

The chartering of a 4-H club establishes it as an official, permanent organization of the National Cooperative Extension system. All 4-H 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.

What Does It Mean To Be Chartered?

- Your club has the privilege of identifying itself as a 4-H club or group by using the 4-H club name and emblem.
- You agree to provide a positive youth development environment that upholds the dignity and educational purposes of the 4-H program.
- Your club will have the right to raise and collect funds in the name of 4-H with the approval of 4-H staff.

How Do Clubs Become Chartered?

- The Application for Club Charter can be found in the 4-H Club Secretary’s record book or by contacting the Extension Office.
- Leaders will meet with the club to make sure everyone understands the purpose and requirements for chartering.
- Requirements to be chartered:
 - The club enrolls a membership of 5 or more people.
 - The club enrolls at least one local leader or advisor.
 - The members organize as a club and elect officers.
 - The club plans and adopts a program for the year.

After these required steps are met, the new club fills out an Application for Club Charter and submits it to the Cornell Cooperative Extension Office Each chartered club receives an official charter certificate, a copy of which is kept in the Extension Office.

4-H Club By-Laws

Each 4-H club is encouraged to develop bylaws. This document reflects the organizational makeup of the 4-H club. It describes when and where the club meets, what officers the club elects, etc. The entire 4-H club is responsible for writing and approving the bylaws. It is important that members, parents and volunteer leaders have input in how the club operates. After completing the bylaws, forward a copy to the local Extension Office. The bylaws should be reviewed on a regular basis.

Planning a Group Program

Planning a yearly calendar 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.

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

The effective planning method must be suitable to the characteristics of the club and will:

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

Leadership

Group Leadership should involve young people in age-appropriate roles. The most common form of youth leadership in clubs are club officers. Have Cloverbud or younger members take turns with each Officer role. Give them a script to follow, teaching them what to say during each agenda item. Older members may follow Roberts Rules of Order and elect officers for the year. Elect officers democratically and make sure they are trained in what their role involves. Have Teen Leaders mentor younger or less experienced officers. Clubs should work together to create a leadership structure that works best for them and involves everyone, youth and adults.

Members should run the club meetings and make a majority of the decisions. Conducting meetings, with the guidance of adult volunteers, is an excellent way for young people to build leadership and communication skills. The organizational leader has the responsibility of meeting with the club officers prior to the meeting to help them plan the agenda. A 4-H club's environment provides an opportunity for members to share ideas and reach decisions based on those ideas. The club environment should be focused on helping young people learn how to make decisions, live with choices and follow through on commitments. The Extension office has good resources to help make meetings successful.

Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships



Adult-centered leadership

An adult-centered leadership relationship consists of programs that are conceived and driven completely by adults, without employing any youth decision making.

Adult-led collaboration

An adult-led collaboration includes programs or situations where adults provide guidance for youth, but the youth have some input in decision making, albeit limited by adults' discretion.

Youth-adult partnership

The youth-adult partnership category is located centrally on the continuum. This is a point of stasis where a partnership is achieved between youth and adults. Youth and adult participants have equal chances in utilizing skills, decision making, mutual learning, and independently carrying out tasks to reach common goals.

Youth-led collaborations

Youth-led collaborations are programs or projects where youth primarily develop the ideas and make decisions while adults typically provide needed assistance.

Youth-centered leadership

Youth-centered leadership includes programs or activities led exclusively by youth, with little or no adult involvement



Meetings and Club Activities

Everyone should leave 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.

Successful groups:

Use Group Decision-Making Procedures

Parliamentary procedure is one method of decision-making that can be used by a 4-H club or group. It is a skill 4-H members can learn now, that will be useful to them in adulthood. Consensus decision-making is also an option. The type of decision-making procedure a club chooses to employ should be based on the type of decision to be made.

Involve Teen Leaders

Teen Leaders are 4-H teens 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.

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.

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.

Evaluate Meetings Regularly and Take Action When Problems Arise

After the group has met 4 to 6 times, take a close look at how things are going. Schedule a special meeting with all leaders, officers and perhaps some parents to summarize and analyze the data. 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?
- What can be done to improve meetings? Who will do it?
- Others?

Web Page Guidelines for 4-H Groups

Web Site Content Guidelines

Creating web pages increases communication and provides opportunities for learning valuable technology and life skills. Those responsible for the 4-H web pages have freedom of design but must comply with clover protection policies and the guidelines listed here intended to protect youth and the reputation of the 4-H Youth Development program.

Protecting the 4-H Clover

Be sure to follow proper use guidelines. Complete information about 4-H Name and Emblem Use is available at http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/4h_name.htm. Discuss questions with County 4-H Staff.

Mandatory Links

All club sites must include links to Cornell Cooperative Extension Clinton County website (www.cce.cornell.edu/clinton) and the New York State 4-H Website (<http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu>).

Encouraged Statements

4-H Mission Statement

The mission of Cornell Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development is to create supportive learning environments in which diverse youth and adults reach their fullest potential as capable, competent, and caring citizens.

Non-discrimination statement

CCE Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Statement Cornell Cooperative Extension actively supports equal educational and employment opportunities. No person shall be denied admission to any educational program or activity or be denied employment on the basis of any legally prohibited discrimination involving, but not limited to, such factors as race, color, religion, political beliefs, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital or family status, veteran status, or disability. Cornell Cooperative Extension is committed to the maintenance of affirmative action programs that will assure the continuation of such equality of opportunity.

Protection

The privacy of 4-H members and adult volunteer participating in the program needs to be protected. This includes, but is not limited to, the following items:

- Youth and volunteer's addresses and phone numbers should not be posted. (Email addresses may be used only for adults (You may wish to use a separate email for club related correspondence.)
- Youth in photographs should not be identified by full name.
- Club information should be general and not include individual names, phone numbers, addresses, and/or towns. Always instruct user to contact the 4-H office or appropriate county 4-H staff for more information about the 4-H program. If your site is for your club only, you may wish to use a web site or a blog which limits users. In that case – you would be safe to share more details.

Content

Web site content must be directly related to 4-H Youth Development programs, clubs, projects, and activities. Web site content should represent the 4-H Youth Development Program in a positive way. Commercial businesses, products, or resources cannot be promoted or sold. If a particular product, educational program or other specifically named item is included, a disclaimer statement should be included somewhere on the page that states that neither the 4-H Youth Development Program nor Cornell Cooperative Extension is endorsing the said item. The following is the official disclaimer statement: "Mention or display of a trademark, proprietary product or firm in text or figures does not constitute an endorsement by Cornell Cooperative Extension and does not imply approval to the exclusion of other suitable products or firms."

Updates

The nature of a web site is to keep the information up-to-date. If a web site can no longer be maintained or the club dissolves the web site should be removed.

Email

If an email address is included on the site, the email contact must be an adult volunteer. The adult volunteer responsible for the web site should develop a system to respond to email questions in a timely, accurate, and appropriate manner, keeping in mind that this email represents the 4-H Youth Development Program.

4-H Club/Group Website Checklist

- Read the NYS 4-H Website guidelines
- Notify your CCE 4-H staff prior to publishing your club's site.
- In your design, be sure to include the following information:
- Proper 4-H Name and clover emblem use
- Links to:
- Your local CCE county website
- New York State 4-H Website:
<http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu>
- You may want to include the:
 - 4-H Mission statement
 - Nondiscrimination statement
- Make sure not to include:
 - Personal information regarding 4-H members and leaders
 - Pictures with individuals identified by full name
 - Non 4-H related content

Club Reporting to the Extension Office

4-H Club leadership is responsible for reporting on their club activities each year.

The following forms are completed annually:

- Club Financial Statement and Audit
- Year End Project Report
- Club Description and Supply Request
- Community Service Report(s) (as applicable)

These are completed throughout the year:

- Monthly Secretary and/or News Reports—Clubs need to submit monthly reports about their activities, even if the report is just to say the club didn't meet that month. We will put the contents of club reports in the Clover Express.
- Community Service Report(s) (as service activities are completed)

Troubleshooting Club Problems

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." Contact 4-H Staff as needed to help resolve problems.