



What is 4-H?

4-H is the youth development program of the Cooperative Extension Service. It focuses on the needs, concerns and interests of young people. Its aim is to help youth gain a positive self-concept, rational social behavior, knowledge and problem-solving capabilities.

Through planned individual projects, meetings, group activities and participation in different events, members develop new skills, learn cooperation, develop leadership abilities, improve their citizenship and have fun.

Young people from all ethnic or cultural groups, regardless of geographic location may participate. Age groups generally range from 9 to 19; your local Extension office has specific information for your state. A 4-H member is any youth who enrolls and participates in a planned sequence of learning experiences.

Members are guided by Extension staff members or trained volunteers.

The minimum criterion for membership is participation in six or more learning activities 20 to 60 minutes long. The length of the learning event should be adapted to the attention span appropriate to the age of youth involved. This project experience can take place once a week or when appropriate.

Youth participation is the key to 4-H. The learning-by-doing model of education works best when young people are fully involved. The greater the involvement, the greater the educational benefit.

What are participation avenues in 4-H?

Youth can participate in 4-H programs via 4-H clubs, short term groups, 4-H clover kids and 4-H activities.

4-H Clubs

These are organized groups that meet at regularly scheduled times with one or more volunteer leaders and elected youth officers. 4-H clubs normally meet on a 9 to 12-month basis with one or more meetings per month.

Several types of clubs can be organized:

- Community or neighborhood clubs consist of members who live reasonably close to each other. These clubs



often offer a wide variety of 4-H projects to the participating members.

- Project clubs are organized around a common interest in a particular project or group of projects. Project clubs can be organized to learn about gardening, photography, animal husbandry, theater arts and other areas of interest to youth.
- School clubs are organized in public or private schools. Project activities are usually conducted outside of school hours and can be organized around a single project for all or several members. These clubs are usually led by teachers or other volunteers.

Short-term groups

4-H members work on short-term projects that are completed in six or more meetings. Each group works on a specific topic or project. Groups work under the supervision of an adult volunteer or teen leader.

Two major types of short-term groups are recognized in this category:

- School curriculum enrichment: Through cooperative arrangements between schools and the Cooperative Extension Service, schoolteachers present Extension-developed learning materials in the classroom. These educational experiences are designed to enhance the educational programs of the schools.
- Special interest projects: Usually, these groups organize for the duration of the project instruction under the leadership of adult or teen volunteers. Groups can have a formal structure or not. At the end of each program, youth are invited to become involved in either additional special interest projects or organized clubs. An example in this category is the Expanded Nutrition Program for Youth. In this program, youth groups receive instruction on food and good nutrition practices using special educational resources.

4-H Clover kids

This program is affiliated with 4-H and is specially designed for youth ages 5 to 8. A "4-H Clover Kids" group can be organized within a

regular 4-H club. Clover Kids groups have a non-competitive focus which is the most developmentally appropriate.

4-H Activities

Many types of activities and projects are available to 4-H members. Every 4-H member is expected to complete at least one Extension-sponsored project every year. In addition to project activity, 4-H youth are expected to participate in club organization and management, community service or service learning projects and leadership development. Many young people attend leadership programs, competitive or educational events, and camp programs as part of their 4-H experience.

Who sponsors 4-H?

4-H is sponsored jointly by the land grant universities of each U.S. state, the Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, (USDA) and county commissioner's courts. Many private donors also provide either financial or in-kind program support.

Volunteers are the cornerstone of the 4-H program in the community. They conduct educational activities with youth and serve in other specialized roles.

Orientation and assistance with the total 4-H program is provided by county Extension educators or agents in each county or parish. State and area 4-H and youth development specialists support County Staff with materials as well as technical and management assistance.

The organization

Local 4-H members, parents and volunteer 4-H leaders determine the objectives and establish annual goals for their 4-H club or group. These goals are normally established on the basis of goals identified for the 4-H program at the county level.

Most counties have a 4-H subcommittee concerned with overall planning, program direction and support for Extension 4-H and youth work. The subcommittee's work is coordinated by the Extension staff in the county.

Many counties also have a county adult leaders association which serves primarily as a vehicle for providing volunteer training and support of the 4-H program.

Furthermore, many counties have a county 4-H council composed of one or more youth representatives of each 4-H club or group in the county to enhance countywide coordination and participation in planning and conducting 4-H activities.

4-H Emblem and colors

The 4-H club emblem is a four-leaf clover with the letter "H" on each leaf. The four "H's" stand for head, heart, hands and health. The leaves of the clover are green and the "H's" are white. The white is for purity. Green is nature's most common color and is symbolic of youth, life and growth.

The 4-H Name and Emblem belong to the 4-H Youth Development Program, under the authority of USDA. It is a federally protected emblem by the U.S. Congress under code "18 4SC707."

In Spanish-speaking countries where 4-H programs have been established the organization is known as 4-S. Each letter means (S) Salud, (S) Saber, (S) Sentir and (S) Servir.

4-H Motto

"To Make the Best Better"

4-H Pledge

"I pledge:

My Head to clearer thinking,

My Heart to greater loyalty,

My Hands to larger service, and

My Health to better living, for my club, my community, my country, and my world."

4-H Prayer

Help me, O Lord, to live so that the world may be a little better because Thou didst make me.

Reference: This publication is an edited and updated version of the "Texas 4-H Leaders Handbook."

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