

## **Lesson 10:** **Knowing the Basics About Clubs**

### **What is a 4-H Club?**

The 4-H club serves as the primary means of delivering youth development programming in 4-H. It has the advantage of providing long term involvement with the support of “caring” adults. Surveys of youth who have been involved in out-of-school youth programs report the importance youth place on knowing that these programs will continue over many years. Youth are reluctant to take ownership in groups or establish relationships with leaders when they appear temporary. 4-H clubs are organized and supported to “be there” for youth throughout their developmental years. While other delivery methods used in 4-H are effective, the more in-depth experiences occur in and through the club.

Because of the key role clubs play in 4-H delivery, it is important to have a clear definition of what a 4-H club is. The goals and structure of 4-H clubs vary according to the needs of the members they serve. Some clubs focus on one project or one project at a time that the entire membership experiences together at the club meeting. Some clubs offer a selection of projects delivered through project meetings held at times outside the club. Some clubs have a singular focus such as community service clubs, or they target a specific audience such as tribal reservation clubs or after school clubs or home school clubs. But there are components and characteristics that are common to all 4-H clubs and these commonalities provide the definition of a 4-H club.

A 4-H Club:

- Is an organized group of youth.
- Has a planned program that is ongoing throughout all or most of the year.
- Is advised by adult staff or volunteers.
- Typically elects officers.
- May meet in any location.
- Includes opportunities to learn skills through a wide variety of project experiences.
- Offers opportunities for leadership, citizenship/community service, and public speaking.

## Criteria for 4-H Youth Development Programming Including 4-H Clubs USDA/CSREES

While each state has its own policies governing 4-H clubs, these policies must be in line with criteria governing all youth development programming delivered through 4-H as set by national (CSREES/USDA) headquarters.

- 4-H programs, curricula, and procedures are based in research and are developmentally appropriate.
- 4-H programs are based on the needs of children/youth and their parents.
- 4-H provides access to resources of Land Grant University Cooperative Extension System. 4-H provides members access to county, state, national 4-H opportunities.
- 4-H membership is open to all youth.
- 4-H program delivery employs experiential learning strategies.
- 4-H encourages active involvement and participation by children/youth and adults in all aspects.
- 4-H relies heavily on youth and adult volunteers/staff leaders to provide a critical support system for 4-H.
- 4-H provides training for volunteer/staff leaders recognizing that training is essential for effective 4-H programs.
- 4-H adapts to and supports mobility of children/youth and parents.
- 4-H clubs comply with national 4-H name and emblem policies and policies of the state.



## **Enrollment**

Information on state specific criteria for enrollment of clubs, members, and volunteers should have been provided for county personnel during new-hire orientation training. If it was not, it will be important that you contact your state office to obtain that information. If you are partnering with 4-H, the 4-H agent in your county will help you meet county requirements.

### **Enrolling A 4-H Club**

Each state has established criteria that may vary to some degree for enrolling as an official 4-H Club. Some states have a formal process for chartering a club. Official enrollment as a 4-H Club and/or receipt of a 4-H Club charter gives the club the authority to use the 4-H name and emblem. Examples of what may be necessary for official enrollment are as follows:

- The local club has a set number of members with completed enrollments
- The club is organized with youth officers
- There are one or more appointed and trained club leaders
- An initial meeting place is secured for at least several consecutive months
- An official club name is chosen
- Club rules, which may be in the form of by-laws, are established. By-Laws will be discussed more fully in Lesson 11.
- At least six or more regular meetings plus project meetings are scheduled
- A written educational plan for the club program and activities is presented to the county 4-H office

A copy of the club enrollment is kept on file with the local 4-H office.

### **Enrolling Members**

Enrollment of members, volunteers and leaders is required for participation in a 4-H club. This enrollment is done through the county and submitted to the state office. The county 4-H office has the necessary forms and instructions for completion. Most 4-H offices use a computer enrollment system, which means the forms must be filled out completely and accurately. The 4-H program year is considered to operate from October 1 through September 30 or from January 1 through December 31 depending upon individual states.

All members and volunteers must enroll annually. The enrollment due date for members of 4-H clubs will be determined by the county 4-H agent. Enrollment forms of new members and volunteers who join the club during the year, will be submitted immediately to the county 4-H office by the club leader. Enrollment forms may include releases for use of photographs, agreements for non-discriminatory membership, and other mutual agreements as determined by individual states. Often a state 4-H membership code of conduct and/or a list of leader expectations must be read and signed and submitted with the enrollment form.

Eligibility for competition and some project involvement requirements are often determined by birth date or grade in school. Contact your county 4-H agent for accurate information for your state.

### **Enrolling Volunteers**

Most states require that volunteers complete a screening and training process prior to serving as an official 4-H leader and working directly with youth. Position descriptions that outline leader responsibilities are usually provided. This topic will be discussed in greater detail in Lesson 15. Throughout the year, youth and staff/volunteers who participate in special programs beyond the club level (e.g. County 4-H Camp, State 4-H Conference, State Leader's Forum, National Technology Conference) may be required to complete additional forms such as health information, parent/guardian permission, code of ethics, etc. which relate to the specific event.

### ***Fiscal Requirements***

#### **Tax Exemption**

4-H Clubs are exempt from the payment of income taxes. The ruling was issued to the Department of Agriculture by the Internal Revenue Service on April 24, 1946, which recognized that 4-H Clubs were exempt from federal income tax under section 101(6) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1939, which corresponds to section 501(c)(3) of the 1986 Code.

#### **Member Fees/Dues**

Some states require 4-H members to pay membership dues, and some states do not. Sometimes counties will assess fees to cover the cost of insurance, newsletters or other specified items.



**SECTION III:**  
**Starting and Maintaining 4-H Clubs**

**Insurance**

Liability and accident insurance coverage varies within each state as well as within local 4-H programs and for partners participating with 4-H. This information should have been provided for county personnel during new-hire orientation training. If it was not, it will be important that you contact your state office to obtain the information. Ensuring proper coverage for members and volunteers is extremely important and protects you and the organization. If you are partnering with 4-H you will want to ask your county agent for information and forms concerning insurance coverage available to your 4-H club. And work with that office to complete the paper work.

**Reporting**

County 4-H Agents report data to CSREES/USDA in an annual statistical report of summarized demographic data regarding members and volunteers. This information includes the numbers of clubs in the county, member enrollment and narrative information about the program. Staff training in each state prepares county 4-H agents to complete the required report. If you are a youth development professional working with a 4-H club within an organization outside Extension, your county agent will need to include data on your club in this report.

The information you supply the county 4-H office may well be the same information your organization requests.

In addition to the statistics gathered about your club, you will want to evaluate the success of the club in providing the support youth need. In other words, you will need to be able to state how well the club is contributing to the growth and development of its' members. This assessment involves more than gathering numbers. While the numbers of youth participating does indicate a level of success in reaching youth (they keep coming, or drop out), there are other indicators that will help you assess what is happening for youth in your club. Leaders who schedule time throughout the year to come together to review their clubs as compared to the Indicators of Successful Clubs Check List find it easier to say on target.

