

Lesson 11: **Getting Clubs Started**

This lesson is intended to serve as a guide for starting a 4-H Club. Each state has policies and procedures for starting clubs and these may differ somewhat from state to state. However, the process presented in this lesson uses steps that are common to most state procedures and these steps cover the basic elements you need to get started. If you are starting a 4-H club within another organization, it is essential that you involve and work closely with the 4-H Agent in your county to follow the proper procedures. The following steps, however, are common to the process in all states.

Steps in Establishing a 4-H Club

If you are a youth development professional organizing a 4-H club within your youth program, start with Step 1. If you are an extension youth development professional, it is assumed that you know the county and state policies, and should begin with Step 4.

Start here if you are representing a partnering organization

1. Contact the county 4-H agent
2. Attend local 4-H volunteer/leader training
3. Obtain county and state 4-H policies and guidelines

Start here if you represent Extension

4. Assess youth, parent and community needs and interests
5. Recruit potential club members
6. Conduct Organizational meeting
7. Recruit project leaders and distribute curricula
8. Complete and submit enrollment and other appropriate reports
9. Assist with club by-laws preparation

STEP 1: Contact the county 4-H Agent

The 4-H Agent is your main source of help and the link to the county, state and national policies and guidelines. He or she is located in the 4-H/Cooperative Extension Office in your county or city. In addition to providing help in getting your club started and getting the enrollment forms you will need, the 4-H agent will support you in managing the club. You can expect help in solving problems that arise, advocating for the growth of the club and individual members, and gathering the curricula and resources you need. Your 4-H agent will also

connect you with additional opportunities for youth and volunteers that are available through extension.

These opportunities might include:

- volunteer/leader training opportunities
- recognition opportunities for both volunteers and youth
- county and state competitive and noncompetitive activities and programs, such as fairs, that provide many opportunities for exhibiting projects to showcase the 4-Her's knowledge and skill development and conferences for project training, leadership, and citizenship development
- national events and experiences
- opportunities for individuals and groups to get scholarships or small grants

STEP 2: *Attend local 4-H volunteer/leader training*

Although you are a youth development professional, by attending local 4-H volunteer/leader training, you will learn about the policies and procedures of the county program, as well as the specific 4-H opportunities in that county and state. Participation in this training also offers you the opportunity to network with other 4-H club leaders and the county 4-H staff and to receive and review training on principles of youth development, the experiential learning model and specific 4-H curricula.

STEP 3: *Obtain county and state 4-H policies and guidelines*

This 4-H 101 handbook is intended as an overall guide on how to start 4-H Clubs. It is important that you work closely with the 4-H Agent to ensure that you are following the proper guidelines for your county. Obtaining these policies will let you know how you need to proceed in terms of enrolling the youth as 4-H'ers, whether or not you need to officially charter your club, and appropriate use of the 4-H name and emblem.

STEP 4: *Assess youth, parent and community needs and interests*

As a youth development professional, you probably have a good sense of the needs and interests of the youth currently in your program. You may also be familiar with the kinds of activities parents want their children involved in, and the other out-of school options available for youth in the community. All of these factors will give you direction in determining whether there is a need to start a club, and if so, the kind of club that will meet the needs of your community. Before deciding on how to get the 4-H club going, meet with youth who are currently enrolled in your program as well as potential members and ask for their input into understanding the



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demographics of your community.

Determine what days and times of day are best for meetings, what age groups might be interested. Look at what is already being offered to the youth in your program, and look for ways to integrate this potential club into your overall program.

Step 5: *Recruit potential club members*

Based upon your assessment of the community, identify potential youth and families and invite them to an “exploring possibilities” meeting for potential youth members and their and families. You will need to be very upbeat about 4-H in this invitation. Remember that before you start “spreading the word,” you need to have a thorough understanding of what an exciting, appealing program you have to offer. Your enthusiasm is the key to any marketing efforts!!

Plan the presentation about 4-H that you will make at this meeting based upon what you have learned about the demographics of your community. Tell them a little about 4-H and then ask them lots and lots of questions: What are their interests and needs? How can you match their interests with the options available to you through 4-H?

Plan your presentation to answer these questions youth often ask.

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| Why should I join 4-H? | Can my friends join too? |
| What will we do that is fun? | Can I stay in 4-H if I move? |
| Will I be able to help plan club activities? | What will I learn? |
| What exciting new experiences will I have? | How much will it cost me? |

If I go to one meeting, is there enough cool stuff that I will want to come back to another meeting?

Young people join groups to have fun, do interesting things, meet other youth, and have new experiences. They even want to learn new skills! You will need to show that a 4-H club offers a way to do those things.

Remember that you have great flexibility through 4-H. Projects (photography, youth technology, etc.) are all designed to be very adaptable. For example, if you find that youth want to do hiking and canoeing, that could be the primary focus of



a Community Club – or it could be an important aspect of a photography project/group that documents the trip.

Community resources can be incorporated into the experiences offered through the club. If youth want to hike and you have people with technical expertise in your community who would like to help young people gain access to Global Positioning Systems, you can have a great learning experience. A 4-H Citizenship Club might want to do a community clean up project or work with another community group in an existing community service activity. The county 4-H program may have Teen Ambassadors who could partner with teens in your club who are new to 4-H.

At this exploring meeting, you will also want to gather some information from those attending that will help you with the next step in forming a club. Record the interests surfaced from the group. This will help you identify the curriculum materials that support these interests so that you can have them ready to share with the club at their first meeting. Find out what days and times for meetings work best with this particular group. Determine if any of the adults attending the meeting would be interested in serving as leaders of the group. Find out the best means for contacting the youth and adults attending this meeting regarding future meetings. You will want to leave the meeting with a complete roster of names, street addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses. If sufficient interest is shown in starting a club at this meeting, you are ready to move on to step 6.

STEP 6: *Conduct an organizational meeting*

Recruit an adult volunteer to serve as the club leader for your new club before holding the first meeting. With that leader, plan and schedule an organizational meeting for the club. Invite all the youth and parents who showed interest in joining the club at your exploring meeting and encourage them to invite friends who might also be interested.

A detailed description of effective 4-H meetings is offered in Lesson 12. Use that information to prepare for this first meeting of the club. In brief, you will want to:

Prepare a welcoming space with plenty of room to do some interactive activities.

Greet youth and families as they arrive and introduce people to one another. Lead some introductory group building activities to begin the trust building process.

Share the conducting of the meeting with the new club leader.

Help the group to:

- Determine the kind of club they want to form—single project or multi project. *(You will need to be able to explain these club styles well)*



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- Identify the project or projects they want to study (see step 7). By using the interest survey you took at the exploring meeting you can be prepared to share project curricula with the group to help them make these choices.
- Set some ground rules for working together and determine how they will go about establishing a name and by-laws for the club.
- Determine how and when they will elect officers.
- Determine dates and times for regularly scheduled meetings.
- Experience an activity from one of the sets of project materials that surfaced as an interest. Youth need to leave the meeting having done something that makes them want to return.

STEP 7: *Recruit project leader/leaders and distribute curricula*

Information to help recruit and train volunteers will be covered in Lesson 15. It is important to remember though, that project leaders can be recruited most easily if they are aware of the project curricula they can use and how easy it is to use. Because there are a wide variety of curricula available for your 4-H Club, there truly is something for everyone! 4-H 101 Training has highlighted some of these project options, but there are over 100 curricular options offered in age appropriate formats in the national juried collection of youth curricula administered by the 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System (CCS). In addition, states often have project curricula that address topics specific to state needs.

Youth will also find information on available curricula helpful in planning their 4-H experience. Show them the curricula that correspond to the interests they have expressed and encourage them to explore this material.

Most county offices maintain a resource library that is open to the public. These libraries usually have at least one copy of all of the project curricula that the county supports. Many offices have a copy of all of the CCS project curricula as well as their own state specific curricula. If you are a county 4-H agent, you will want to make sure that you have an up to date library at your county office. The more materials you can have available for the public to see, the better you will be able to explain your program and help youth plan meetings that keep them coming back. If your county can't afford to purchase display copies, you could keep lots of copies of the



CCS catalogue on hand to share with your club members. Look on the CCS web site for more information—www.n4hccs.org.

If you are partnering with 4-H, your 4-H agent will work with you to provide a way for your members to browse through the 4-H curricula. You will also want to find out the cost of the materials. Some curricula is available free of charge through your county office, and others may have a nominal fee.

STEP 8: *Complete and submit enrollment and other appropriate reports.*

Each club is responsible for completing any necessary paperwork and submitting it to the county office as required. Counties must provide an annual report to the state office related to the number of youth involved in 4-H, and the ways in which they are participating. States, in turn, must report to the federal headquarters at CSREES/USDA. If you are forming a club within an organization outside Extension, the information your county agent needs for the annual report will be information that will help you justify the club in your organization as well. Work with your county 4-H Agent to determine what paperwork needs to be completed and the due dates.

Data gathered is also used to generate county or state mailing lists for newsletters and distribution of other pertinent information via postal or electronic mailings to the membership and volunteers. Enrollment data verifies eligibility requirements for local, state and national competitions. A privacy statement is frequently included explaining how the data will be used and what the consequences may be if the data is not provided.

Step 9. *Assist with club by-laws preparation*

It is important to make sure that all members of the club agree upon the way in which the club will operate. Putting this understanding into writing lessens the chance that conflicts will arise during the course of the year and will assist in handling disagreements that do arise. 4-H clubs typically prepare by-laws to serve as this written agreement.

By-laws for 4-H Clubs reflect the standards and procedures that the 4-H club's members and leaders are going to follow. They may be very simple or more detailed and complex but, in whatever form, they will describe when and where the club meets, who may join, what officers the club elects, and what criteria are used for a member to remain in good standing. They will also include a non-discrimination statement that is used by the local 4-H office. A copy of the club by-laws must be on file with the local 4-H office



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and is a pre-requisite for most club charters. If changes are made, a new copy must be sent to the local 4-H office.

If you are an Extension youth development professional you will want to find out the state and county guidelines, if any, for club by-laws. If you are a youth development professional representing an organization outside Extension, your county 4-H agent can give you any requirements that you might need to meet with your club's by-laws.

All members, parents and leaders should receive a copy of the by-laws. On an annual basis, club members, parents and leaders should review the by-laws to be certain that everyone is aware of the expectations for club membership. Often new goals or objectives for members are included in the club program plan as well.

Writing and Approving By-Laws

The entire 4-H club is responsible for writing and approving the by-laws. It is important that members, parents, and leaders have input into the way the club is operated. Language should be appropriate to the age of the members and policies should be written from a positive viewpoint. A committee should review and update the by-laws annually for the club.

The local 4-H agent will review and approve the club by-laws and assure that there are no restrictions to membership such as dues or uniform requirements and that the attendance expectation requirements are reasonable and inclusive. Often times new goals or objectives for members are included in the club program plan as well.



Example of By-Laws

By-Laws of (name) 4-H Club

Article 1 - Name

The name of this organization shall be the _____ 4-H club.

Article 2 - Purpose

The purpose of this 4-H club is to support the development of its members through club meetings, project work, demonstrations, fairs, and other activities.

Article 3 - Policies

The club will meet regularly to conduct business. Meetings will be held once a month no less than 6 times during the year. Any major decision of the club must be voted upon by 2/3 of the membership.

Article 4 - Membership

Section 1 – Any youth, without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin, who is age 8-18 as of January 1, of the current year may become a member of this club.

Section 2 - To become a member, a person must attend three meetings, complete an enrollment form with parent/guardian signatures, agree to abide by the 4-H code of conduct, and know the 4-H pledge.

Section 3 - Members must attend 50% of the club meetings held to remain in good standing to exhibit at the fair. The leader, with the executive committee, shall review the reasons for absence to determine whether a member's name is removed from the roll.

Article 4 - Officers, Elections, and Duties

Section 1 - The elected officers of this club shall be president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and reporter. The appointed officers shall be recreation leader, song leader and historian.

Section 2 - Officers shall be elected annually in the month of November and shall begin the term of office in January. Other offices will be appointed. In January the executive committee will appoint other officers.

An officer shall have been a member in good standing of the club for three months prior to election.

Officers shall not succeed themselves.

A nominating committee of three members shall be named one month prior to election of officers for the following year. This committee will consist of the president and two appointed members.

The nominating committee shall submit at least one nominee for each elected office at the meeting in November. Nominations from the floor shall follow the report of the nominating committee.

Section 3 – Officers shall perform duties as set forth in the 4-H Club Officer’s Handbook. Vacancies other than the President shall be filled by a vote of the members at the next regular meeting or appointed by the executive committee.

Elected Officers:

The **president** shall preside at all meetings of the club and have in mind at all times the best interest of the club. The President is also given the responsibility for any Executive meetings and will call these meetings in cooperation with the leader.

The **vice president** shall perform the duties of the President in his or her absence. He or she shall serve as chair of the yearly program committee. An annual club program plan will be submitted with the leader to the county extension office. The vice-president shall succeed to the presidency if such a vacancy occurs.

The **secretary** shall keep a record of the proceedings of the club and an accurate attendance count of the membership.

The **treasurer** shall keep club financial records and follow financial procedures with guidance from the leader. An annual club audit will be submitted to the local 4-H office as requested.

The **reporter** shall write news articles and take pictures to submit to the local newspaper or community newsletter of club activities and member accomplishments.

Appointed Officers:

The **song leader** shall be prepared to lead the group in singing at club meetings and social events.

The **recreation leader** shall be responsible to provide team building and cooperative recreation activities (encouraging all to participate) at club meetings and activities.

The **historian** shall keep a scrapbook of the clubs activities, events, and participation of members in other 4-H or youth activities. The scrapbook may be electronic.



Article 5 - Committees

Section 1 - Executive Committee

The executive committee shall consist of the elected officers and a leader.

The duties of the executive committee shall be to transact any absolutely necessary business that comes up between regular meetings and any other business referred to it by the club members.

The executive committee shall meet between regular meetings as necessary.

Section 2 - Standing and Special Committees

Standing committees shall be appointed by the president as necessary and shall serve to the end of the club year.

The committee shall consist of a chair, co-chair, and enough members to carry out the specific assignment.

Special committees shall be appointed by the president and shall serve only as long as needed

The vice-president shall be a member of all committees except the nominating committee. The vice-president is the chair of the program planning committee.

Article 6 - Meetings

Section 1 - Annually there shall be a minimum of 6 club meetings to begin promptly at 4 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month.

Section 2 – Excused absences will be given for illness and other reasons agreed upon by the local leader and the executive committee, provided they are reported to a club officer or leader before the club meeting.

Section 3 – Members will be required to attend club meetings and project meetings in accordance with the club membership requirements.

Article 7 - Club Reports and Forms

Section 1 – The written club program plan shall be adopted no later than the two meetings of the new club enrollment year.

Section 2 – Enrollment forms for members and volunteers, by-laws new and revised, 4-H code of conduct, animal code of ethics, volunteer expectations, volunteer agreements and position descriptions, fair entries, financial reports and other forms or reports are due to the local extension office upon request.

Article 8 - Amendments

The by-laws may be amended at any regular meeting by a 2/3 vote of the membership provided they do not conflict with the required article.

