



LESSON 10

Nine Steps for Establishing a 4-H Club 


Step 1 -- Contact the county 4-H Agent

Step 2 -- Attend local 4-H volunteer/leader training

Step 3 -- Obtain county and state 4-H policies and guidelines

Nine steps (cont'd) 

- Step 4 -- Assess youth, parent and community needs and interests
- Step 5 -- Recruit potential club members
- Step 6 -- Conduct an organizational meeting

Nine steps (cont'd) 

- Step 7 -- Recruit project leader(s) and distribute curricula
- Step 8 -- Complete and submit enrollment and other appropriate reports
- Step 9 -- Assist with club rules or by-law preparation

LESSON 10

STEPS FOR ESTABLISHING A 4-H CLUB HANDOUT

Each state has its own policies and procedures for starting 4-H clubs. The process presented in Lesson 10 includes the basic steps common to most states. 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 proper procedures.

Steps for 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 an organizational meeting
7. Recruit project leaders and distribute curricula
8. Complete and submit enrollment and other appropriate reports
9. Assist with club rules or 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. The 4-H agent will help get your club started and 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, providing professional development training, 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 and conferences
 - national events and experiences
 - information on scholarships or small grants for individuals or groups

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

- By attending local 4-H volunteer/leader training you will learn about policies and procedures of the county program, as well as specific 4-H opportunities in that county and state. Participation in 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

- The 4-H 101 manual provides national 4-H policy on name, emblem, chartering, etc. 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 inform you on issues related to enrollment, how to charter clubs, appropriate use of the 4-H name and emblem, if the county 4-H program charges member fees, how to obtain curricula, etc.

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 youth currently living in your community. You may also be familiar with the kinds of activities parents want for their children and the other out-of school options available for youth. All of these factors will give you direction in determining the kind of club that will meet youths' and parents' needs. Before starting your 4-H club, meet with potential members to get their input into understanding the demographics of your community. Determine what days and times are best for meetings, what age groups are interested, and finally, consider what youth programming efforts are currently offered.

Step 5: Recruit potential club members

- Based upon your assessment of the community, identify potential youth and their families and invite them to an “exploring possibilities” meeting for the entire family. Be very upbeat about 4-H in this invitation and 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 your presentation about 4-H based upon what you have learned about the demographics of your community. Talk a little bit about 4-H and then ask your audience lots of questions. What are youths' and families' interests and needs? How can you match their interests with the options available through 4-H? Plan your presentation to answer questions youth often ask. Some of these questions might include:
 - 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?
 - How much will it cost?

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 all these things. Remember that 4-H projects 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 your 4-H program. If youth want to hike, team them with community members who have access to Global Positioning Systems for 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 your exploratory 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 of 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 exploratory meeting and encourage them to invite interested friends. A description of an effective 4-H meeting is included in Lesson 11. Use that information to prepare for this first meeting. In general, 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 an introductory group-building activity to begin building trust.
 - Share the conducting of the meeting with the new club leader.
 - Help the group to determine whether they want a single-project or multi-project club. By using the interest survey you took at the exploratory meeting you can be prepared to share project curricula with the group.
 - Work together to develop grounds rules or by-laws for the club.
 - Decide whether the club will elect officers.
 - Do an activity from a project that was identified as one of 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

- 4-H project leaders can be recruited more easily if they are familiar with the project curricula 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 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. 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. 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. 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 are available free 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 of the number of youth involved in 4-H and how they are participating. States, in turn, must report to the National 4-H Headquarters at USDA. If you are forming a club within an organization outside Extension, the information your county agent needs for the annual report will help 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. Photo release and privacy statements explaining how the data will be used are also frequently included.

STEP 9: Assist with club rules or by-laws preparation

- It is important to make sure that all members of the club agree upon the way the club will operate. Putting this understanding into writing lessens the chance that conflicts will arise during the course of the year and assists in handling disagreements that do arise. 4-H clubs typically prepare rules or 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 follow. They describe when and where the club meets, what (if any) officers the club elects, and what criteria are used for a member to remain in good standing. A copy of the club by-laws must be on file with the local 4-H office 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 need to find out the state and county guidelines for club rules or by-laws. If you are a youth development professional representing an organization outside Extension, your county 4-H agent can help you develop this document. Language should be appropriate to the age of the members and rules should be short and written from a positive viewpoint. All members, parents and leaders should receive a copy of the by-laws, and on an annual basis everyone should review them to be certain of the expectations for club membership. The local 4-H agent will review and approve the club bylaws and ensure that there are no restrictions to membership and that the attendance expectation requirements are reasonable and inclusive.

LESSON 10

EXAMPLE OF BY-LAWS HANDOUT



4-H Club/Group By-Laws

One of the requirements for a 4-H Club or Group to receive a 4-H Charter is that the club/group has a set of guidelines which establish the parameters for the club/group. These guidelines are usually in the form of by-laws.

The club or group members take responsibility, with guidance from a 4-H adult volunteer, for establishing the by-laws. The written guidelines for a club or group should not exceed two pages. It is important that by-laws be written in such a way that they do not eliminate any youth from participation or discriminate against any youth. The guidelines established should be simple, easy to understand, and approved by the city or county 4-H youth development agent/educator.

A sample outline for club/group by-laws is provided for use by clubs in your county/city program.

SAMPLE

By-Laws of _____ 4-H Club/Group

Name

The name of this organization shall be _____ .

Purpose

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

Policies

- The club/group will meet regularly once a month to conduct business.
- Any major decision of the club must be voted upon by 2/3 of the membership

Membership

- Without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin, any youth, age 8-18 as of January 1, of the current year may become a member of this club.
- To become a member, a person must attend three meetings and know the 4-H pledge.
- A member shall be dropped from club enrollment if he/she misses three consecutive meetings without reasonable explanation.
- The leader, with the executive committee, shall review the reasons for absence to determine whether a member's name is removed from the roll.

Officers, Elections, and Duties

- The elected officers of this club/group shall be president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and reporter
- Officers shall be elected annually in the month of December and shall begin term of office in January
- An officer shall have been a member in good standing of the club for three months prior to election
- Officers shall not succeed themselves.
- There shall be a nominating committee of three members: the president and two appointed members at least one month prior to election.
- The nominating committee shall submit at least one nominee for each office at the meeting in December.
- Nominations from the floor shall follow the report of the nominating committee.

- Only those members who are eligible and willing shall be accepted as nominees.
- The appointed officers shall be historian, recreation leader and song leader.
- These officers shall be appointed in January by the executive committee.
- An appointed officer shall have been a member in good standing for three months prior to appointment.
- Officers shall perform duties set forth in the 4-H Officer Handbook.
- The vice-president shall succeed to the presidency if such vacancy occurs.
- Other vacancies shall be filled by a vote of the members at the next regular meeting or appointed by the executive committee.

Meetings to begin promptly at ____ p.m. on the ____ of each month.

Executive Committee

- The executive committee shall consist of the officers and standing committee chairs (and leaders).
- The duties of the executive committee shall be to transact any absolutely necessary business between regular meetings and any other business referred to it by the club members.
- The executive committee shall meet between regular meetings as necessary.

Standing and Special Committees

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

Article IX: 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 articles.

This is just a sample of by-laws from one state. Some of these things may not be true in your state. Please check with your local 4-H office.