



4-H Projects

Projects are the foundation tools used by 4-H for helping youth develop life skills. By understanding the importance of project work, you will be better able to guide both the youth you work with and the project volunteers you recruit.

Developing Life Skills

The goal of 4-H programming is to provide developmentally appropriate projects and activities for youth to:

- Experience life skills.
- Practice them until they are learned.
- Be able to use them as necessary throughout a lifetime.

Through “learn-by-doing,” youth both learn and apply these skills appropriately. Life skills are nothing more than the abilities and skills that youth can learn to help them be successful in living a productive and satisfying life.

The Learning Environment

The 4-H setting enhances the benefits of project participation by providing a positive learning environment. To help create a positive learning environment for youth, keep the following in mind:

- Young people learn best in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.
- They must have clear, self determined goals.
- Each youth has different abilities. The same learning method will not be equally successful with all members.
- Learning requires motivation. Self motivation comes from basic needs, personal preferences, and feelings of self-worth and belonging. External motivation is based on incentives and awards received from others.
- Youth must be actively involved in selecting and carrying out their learning activities.
- It is important to remember that while the printed project materials outline a variety of planned learning experience and activities, you also need to recognize, create, and build on “teachable moments”.
- Self-evaluation (that is, the youth’s own assessment of his/her achievement and what is needed to “make the best better”) is the most meaningful kind of evaluation.

Try these methods to enhance project learning:

- Encourage inquisitiveness, show where and how to find answers to questions.
- Brainstorm creative solutions.
- Ask questions.
- Encourage members to become more independent and make their own decisions.
- Encourage individual expression within the group.
- Use a short, simple demonstration or illustrated talk.
- Involve members in role playing.
- Arrange a tour of personal interest to members (e.g., a food tour which shows where things come from or how they are used, etc.)
- Combine teaching methods that allow members to use all five senses.
- Praise and reward good work, interest, cooperation and the acceptance of responsibility.
- Avoid overly competitive situations.
- Avoid comparing efforts of one child to another.
- As appropriate, use games during meetings to increase energy level and fun.

The Leader's Guide (or Helper's Guide) for most 4-H projects will state the age group for which it was designed. Each guide will have incorporated the Experiential Learning Model in its content of "learning by doing" Many projects have been developed in a series, with each level building on the previous. To learn more about the Experiential Learning Model go to the tool box.

This enables you to select activities from different levels of the same project to tailor learning experiences for members who are at different levels of development.

Encourage youth to select project activities that stretch their current abilities and are still appropriate for their developmental stage.

See the section on *How Kids Develop* under *Preparing to Support Youth* for information about understanding age-group characteristics. Note: Clover Kids participate in activities rather than projects. (See the 4-H Clover Kids Leader Handbook for information.)

As the 4-H member grows in knowledge and experience, the leader's role should change gradually from experiences being more adult directed to being more member directed.

Selecting Projects and Materials

With over 50 projects to choose from guiding members in their selections can be an overwhelming task. You may recruit other volunteers in your club or group to take on this task with the youth.

Youth may select as many projects as they like; however, it is more rewarding for youth to only select those that they can realistically complete. For younger members, two to three projects may be appropriate. Members are more likely to complete a project when:

- You set standards for performance together.
- They take part in planning what they will do to meet these standards.
- There is a caring adult to support and work with the youth.
- Group gatherings are friendly and fun.
- They feel they are important with important things to do.

Youth should be encouraged to utilize the variety of curriculum resources and manuals that 4-H has available to them and then supplement with other resources as needed.

4-H Pick a Project Newspaper provides basic information about the project area with resources and ideas listed to get youth started in the project. Records are designed “Basic, Experienced or Advance” and are described in more detail later in this section.

Manuals are designed specifically for the project area. They are mostly workbooks that guide the youth’s learning. Youth will also find it helpful to learn how to obtain and utilize other resources for their project work. Many ideas are provided in 4-H project manuals and resources.

Encourage youth to learn from others in the club, volunteer project leaders or others in the community. Visit with your local Extension Staff for other available resources.

Philosophy of Record Keeping

The purpose of 4-H record keeping *is to teach how to* keep records, which is an important life skill. Record keeping is an ongoing process that does not end when the 4-H year ends. Youth are encouraged to select from a variety of alternatives to meet their individual record keeping needs and learning styles.

Objectives of Record Keeping

1. To learn how to set goals, *how* to make plans for action, and how to decide how well you did (evaluation).
2. To learn the skills of record keeping and organization to use now and in the future.
3. To learn to communicate and summarize.
4. To learn responsibility by completing a task.
5. To evaluate information that will market personal skills through future resumes and application forms.

Guidelines for 4-H Record Keeping

All 4-H'ers are encouraged to develop a record keeping system that includes:

- Record keeping for one or more project(s)
- Completion of *Yearly 4-H Summary* 4H-96 or a *4-H Story*
- Member self-evaluation and/or a member-mentor conference.

4-H'ers are encouraged to select one or more of the following for their project records:

- *Basic Project Record* (4H-96A)
- *Experienced Project Record* (4H-96B)
- *Advanced Project Record* (4H-96C)
- Project worksheets/manuals, such as livestock, food and nutrition, and others
- Video Tape (4H-97A; Use Basic, Experienced, or Advanced Project Record as reference.)
- Audio Tape (4H-97A; Use Basic, Experienced, or Advanced Project Record as reference.)
- *Portfolio* (4H-97B; Use *Basic, Experienced, or Advanced Project Record* as reference.)
- Computerized form (Use *Basic, Experienced, or Advanced Project Record* as reference.)
- Create your own record keeping system.

Additional support materials also may be added to your record keeping system.

- 4-H record keeping should reflect the 4-H'er's goals, accomplishments, and future plans.
- Specific county record keeping information is available at the Extension Office.

Role of Project Leaders

Project leaders are caring adults or older youth, that focus on the positive development of each youth by using project experiences as the tool.

Many 4-H clubs will recruit parents, other adults and older youth to become project leaders. Project leaders work more closely with the youth in the group who have enrolled in that specific project for the year.

Club project leaders are challenged to guide individual members and conduct two to five project experiences for them. These may be meetings before, after or as part of regular group meetings; tours to appropriate places for the project; work sessions at their home; etc.

Project leaders, older youth or a professional in your community may come as a guest presenter for a project or club meeting.

The local Extension Office may have specialized resources for project training; check it out.

Remember it is important that leadership in your club/group be shared, not only for your own well being, but also to develop leadership skills in others.

Showcasing Project Work

Many 4-Hers look forward to the opportunity of exhibiting their project work at the county fair or achievement day. Exhibiting at a county fair or achievement day is not a requirement of being enrolled in 4-H or project work. These experiences are just another opportunity for project learning. Project evaluation and recognition happens in any of a variety of ways.

Exhibits at an Iowa 4-H exhibition, especially the non-livestock projects, are evaluated utilizing conference judging. Youth bring a representation of their work in each project to an evaluator who will have a personal conference with each youth.

Conferences generally focus on the growth and development of the youth, as well as, the quality of their project's product. To learn more about the exhibit experience go to the tool box "Strengthening Goal-Centered Learning in the Exhibit Experience for Volunteers".

Your support, reinforcement and encouragement add to the depth and meaning of their experience: *How'd it go? What did you learn from the evaluator? Do you have some ideas to try next year? Way to Go! You've come a long way this year!* Remember, this is a learning experience for the youth. Not everyone can come away with purple ribbons but with your help, everyone will come away a winner! So youth may even learn that some projects are not for them.

Celebration

Recognition is important in positive youth development. Everyone needs to feel valued for his/her contribution. Many clubs/groups find ways throughout the year and at the end of the year, to recognize the work of the youth.

Having youth give a short show and tell or demonstration about their project, tours to homes, exhibiting at meetings or with other clubs and then celebrating their progress might be examples.

Other clubs present medals, pins, pencils, etc. at the end of the year for every project completed. Whatever your club decides to do, be sure to avoid equating the worth of project achievements with worth of the youth.

Remember, in 4-H, we are less concerned with the volume of the project content taught than about the volume of caring and nurturing of the youth. The youth need to know that in 4-H they can find someone they can count on, someone who is there when they need a person for support in their project work.

Reference:

Material adapted from Minnesota 4-H Club Management Guide and used with permission U of MN Extension Center for 4-H and Community Youth Development.

... and justice for all

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