
WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF 4-H!



What is 4-H?

Key Ideas

- Introduction to the letter series
- What is 4-H?
- How does the 4-H program work?
- How is the 4-H program delivered?
- What's more important – the 4-H project or the 4-H boy and girl?
- What is the 4-H volunteer's role?

Dear Volunteer,

Thank you for volunteering to be a part of the Iowa 4-H program! You are starting an interesting, challenging, and rewarding experience. Many new volunteers have lots of questions about their new venture, and we hope you will find this series of six letters helpful. New volunteers participate in orientation, new volunteer training at the county/multi-county level, and receive additional resources in your volunteer binder.

Letters to New Volunteers - Contents

(4-H 115-A) provides a preview of all of the letters. At a glance you can identify which letter will have information to begin answering your questions.

The six letters include information on getting started with a 4-H club, planning and conducting 4-H club meetings, tips for working with youth, leadership and teaching techniques, and opportunities for youth and volunteers on the county, state, and national level.

You will notice that at the end of each letter is a section titled, "How I can use the information in this letter." This section allows you to write down your personal thoughts and ideas for later use with your 4-H club.

What is 4-H?

4-H is the youth education program of **Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (ISUEO)** for youth in grades 4-12 that fosters positive youth development based on the needs and strengths of youth, their families, and communities. 4-H provides opportunities for youth to develop skills they can use now and throughout their life. **Clover Kids** is a 4-H program for youth in grades K-3.

4-H member divisions (by grade)

- Junior (grades 4-6)
- Intermediate (grades 7-8)
- Senior (grades 9-12)

Adults who serve as 4-H volunteers are considered representatives of Iowa State University Extension & Outreach 4-H Youth Development program. Through their county and regional Extension staff, volunteers have access to research and information from Iowa State University.

The state leadership for the 4-H program is located on the campus of Iowa State University and at the county level in the county Extension office. At the national level, 4-H is under the leadership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The 4-H mission states: *4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential through youth-adult partnerships and research-based experiences.*

Iowa 4-H has developed a **4-H Equation** to help volunteers and staff succeed in meeting the needs of youth as identified by youth development research. The formula includes *Our Reason* plus *Our Method* plus *Our Mission* to help us reach the *Our Outcomes*. You will find that the **4-H Equation** is the basis for the 4-H experience and is referred to time and again during volunteer training and program design.

To reach *Our Results* of Productive Citizens, Outstanding Communicators, Effective Leaders, and Successful Learners, 4-H combines:

Our Reason: How does 4-H help young people reach these outcomes? Key to helping young people reach these outcomes are caring adults. Volunteers, parents, and staff develop programming and experiences based on youth development research which emphasizes the importance of meeting the four basic human needs of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Studies indicate that youth whose needs are met in positive ways are likely to develop into active citizens and contributing members of their families and communities. These four **Youth Needs** are:

- **Belonging** – Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in group settings. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group.
- **Mastery** – Youth need to feel and believe they are capable, and experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges to develop their self-confidence. Through the exploration of ideas and activities related to their interests, youth learn skills and participate in experiences that help them make positive life choices for their future.
- **Independence** – Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. By exercising independence through 4-H leadership opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility and learn to better understand themselves.
- **Generosity** – Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By exploring 4-H community service and citizenship activities, youth can connect to communities and learn to give back to others.

Our Method (also known as Essential Elements):

A Caring adult is actively involved as an advisor, guide and mentor. The adult helps set boundaries and expectations for young people and could also be called supporter, friend, and advocate. This element supports the need for **belonging**.

Safe environment. Caring adults make sure that young people do not experience physical or emotional harm while participating in 4-H - whether from the learning environment itself, adults,

other participants, or spectators. This element supports the need for **belonging**.

Mastery. **Mastery** is the building of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and then demonstrating their use. The level of mastery depends on the ability or interests of the individual youth. It is a process that evolves, sometimes over a period of years, and is not a one-time experience. Adults support the 4-H concept of experiential learning - learning by doing. **Service.** Finding oneself begins with losing the self in the service of others. Adults guide youth in identifying community needs, planning a course of action, then acting, reflecting and learning, and celebrating the experience and accomplishments. Community service learning is a way for members to gain exposure to the larger community, indeed the world itself. It is necessary to actively practice and uphold service in order to develop a sense of **generosity**.

Self-determination. Believing that one has impact over life's events rather than passively submitting to the will and whims of others is self-determination. Caring adults help 4-H members foster a personal sense of influence over their own lives, exercising their potential to become self-directing, autonomous adults. This element directly supports youth's need for **independence**.

Inclusiveness. An inclusive environment is one that allows a sense of **belonging** to develop, encourages and supports its members, and offers encouragement with positive and specific feedback. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members taking pride in the collective efforts of all.

Futuristic. The opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future is crucial to the development of young people. The ability to see oneself in the future is to harness the hope and optimism to shape life choices to facilitate the transition into active participation in future events. It allows for the development of **independence**.

Engagement. An engaged youth is one who is mindful of the subject area, while building interpersonal and intrapersonal relations and connections in order to develop greater understanding. Through self-reflection, the brain has the ability to self-correct and learn from experience. The engaged learner has a high degree of self-motivation and an unending capacity to create. This element has its basis in both **mastery and independence**.

How does the 4-H program work?

It's often said, "It is better to build a child than to mend an adult." This, in a nutshell, is the main objective of the 4-H program.

In 4-H, volunteers encourage youth to gain knowledge and learn practical life skills and to apply both in their project areas. Members learn to work together as a team and develop a sense of fair play. 4-H members learn decision-making skills as well as communication, leadership, and citizenship skills through project work, experiential learning, community service learning, competitive events, and other 4-H educational experiences.

As 4-H members mature, they have opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills within their own club and at county activities. They also begin to develop an appreciation and understanding of their community through individual or club service learning projects and other citizenship projects.

Members improve their communication skills through club interaction, 4-H record keeping, and presentations. They also develop life skills such as basic health and safety and financial practices. They acquire educational and vocational experiences and learn how to make decisions and set realistic goals for themselves.

All of this doesn't happen at once, but develops gradually as members continue their involvement in 4-H under the direction of caring adult volunteers – YOU!

How is the 4-H program delivered?

The structure of a 4-H club or group may take on one of several forms. These include:

1. **Community clubs, project clubs, afterschool or site-based clubs:** 4-H curriculum is taught to youth organized into groups (clubs) that function for several months or throughout the year. There can be afterschool clubs, project clubs, site-based clubs, etc.
2. **Independent membership:** 4-H curriculum is taught to a member guided by an adult mentor. They meet several times a year.

3. **Short-term/special interest:** 4-H curriculum generally is taught over a specified amount of time (e.g., 1 week, 6 weeks, 2 months) and outside of regular school hours. After-school programs, community school programs, special interest group programs, camps, cooperative programs with other agencies and organizations, and school-age child care programs are examples of this delivery method.
4. **School enrichment:** 4-H curriculum is utilized in the classroom during regular school hours. The classroom teacher, a resource person, or a volunteer teaches the subject matter.

What's more important - the 4-H project or the 4-H boy and girl?

The 4-H member, of course! 4-H is a people program. Its objective is to develop young people. Projects are tools for teaching youngsters by stimulating their interests. Our ultimate goal is for the 4-H member to know more and be able to do more at the end of the year. When a 4-H'er leaves the 4-H program, we want them to have gained life skills that will help them be contributing members of our communities and society as a whole. Life skills are what a 4-H'er has left after the ribbon award is put away.



What is the 4-H volunteer's role?

1. To be a caring adult in the lives of your members – to recognize and encourage each 4-H member so the member feels noticed and important (belonging). Your role is to guide and mentor them. Let them know they are important, what they have done is worthwhile, that they belong, and that 4-H is an environment where they are safe both physically and emotionally.

2. To help 4-H members learn skills. 4-H members have fun while "learning by doing." Young people remember better if they actually experience something and have an opportunity for some "hands-on learning" and then reflect on that experience.
3. Help members develop independence - to teach 4-H members how to think, not what to think. We help develop creative thinking in young people by giving them a chance to make decisions on their own. They'll learn from their own choices.

Learning takes place within the learner - it is not something done to the learner. We encourage skills that will be useful to the youngster now and in the future. We help each member develop good habits, experiment with new ideas, practice problem-solving skills, and grow within their chosen projects. By doing this, we help them become self-directed, productive, and contributing members of society.

This is what 4-H is all about - the personal development of each youth.

Welcome to the world of 4-H!

Action Steps

- ◆ Talk with other adults who might take on club volunteer roles.
- ◆ Learn more about how clubs in your area are structured.
- ◆ Attend scheduled volunteer training(s).
- ◆ Gather needed 4-H reference materials.

This is an adaptation of an Oregon State University publication that was prepared by Mary Alice Dodd, 4-H volunteer leader, Linn County; Lyla Houghlum, Extension specialist, 4-H and youth development, Oregon State University; and Michelle Robinson, Extension agent, 4-H youth, Oregon State University Extension Service. Development of this material was funded by R.J.R. Nabisco, Inc., through the National 4-H Council Salute to Excellence Program, September 1987.

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Reference materials

The 4-H Youth Development Experience, 4-H 3020A
 Learn about "Why 4-H" in the Tufts' Research 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/explore/WHy4h.htm>

How can I use the information in this letter:

1. New activities to plan into our club program:

2. Other people who could help us and how they might help:

3. Questions to ask ISU Extension & Outreach staff and other leaders:
