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# WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF 4-H!



## How to Start a 4-H Club

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### Key Ideas

- How to recruit 4-H members-and how many should we have?
- How can I enroll my members?
- What type of club should we choose?
- What is all of this about projects?
- Are there dues for 4-H members?
- What about insurance?
- Where will our club meet?
- How often will our club meet?
- Enrollment guidelines

### Dear Volunteer,

This letter has answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about actually starting a new 4-H club. It is also useful for volunteers working with an already established club. Highlight information you find useful for your situation.

### How to recruit 4-H members and how many should we have?

First of all, how many members? 4-H clubs should have at least five members from 3 or more families. Some suggest that 6 to 10 members per adult leader is an optimum number. Some clubs have as many as 70 youth. However, it depends on the age of the members in your club. It also depends on how many other volunteers will be working with you. Limit your first group to a number with which you and your co-volunteers feel comfortable!

Recruiting members is seldom hard to do. Start with a contact to your county Extension staff. They usually have names of people who want to join a club in your area. Your county Extension staff may have a recruiting program or other ideas for recruiting new club members. You can always write newspaper articles, recruit at schools or church, or just talk up the club to parents and children you know.

Because 4-H receives federal and state funds, we must be certain our programs are made available to all people equally.

You may find it helpful to recruit some other adults to assist you as club volunteers. Interested parents, 4-H alumni, or friends are often willing to help. This gives the lead or organizational volunteer much needed assistance and also provides continuity for club meetings in case of absence of key adults. To provide a safe environment for youth enrolled in 4-H, a child protection policy is in place. Your extension staff will know which volunteers may need to complete the child protection screening process.

### How can I enroll my members?

Your county Extension office has the necessary enrollment forms for you to complete and submit to the office. Iowa 4-H uses an online enrollment process.

All 4-H members and volunteers must re-enroll every year. Some county Extension offices may set a due date for enrollments. It's a good idea to enroll as soon as possible so you and your members remain on the mail or email list to receive notices of all county events and activities. Most counties also have a deadline for project enrollment additions and changes in order to be eligible to participate in state and county fairs and other activities.

After your members have enrolled, check to see if your county has a pin or badge for first-year members and other recognition for second- and third-year members. Your county Extension staff can tell you how and when these are available.

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## What type of club should we choose?

4-H clubs are groups of youth and adults who meet on a regular basis, chartered by the county Extension office. Leadership is jointly provided by youth and adults, there is a planned educational program, the club meets at least 6 hours in any given year, and the club plans to continue meeting from one year to the next. The target audience is 4<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth.

4-H clubs are expected to:

- build youth and adult partnerships,
- set annual club goals and evaluate progress toward those goals,
- plan an educational, experientially based program,
- submit a club calendar to the county Extension office,
- be involved in community service learning activities, and
- keep records of their activities.

**Community Club** is a program initiated and facilitated by youth and adult volunteers in the context of a community (i.e. neighborhood, town, city). These types of clubs aim to engage youth and adults in both individual and group activities that foster learning and development in a variety of subject matter areas (i.e. food and nutrition, mechanics, beef, visual arts, etc.).

**Project Club** is a program focused more deeply on specific subject matter (i.e. robotics, shooting sports, horse, photography, etc.). Project clubs can operate within any school or community setting or as part of any of the other club types. Meeting schedules may vary within a short-term or year-long schedule.

**Afterschool Club** is a program offered to youth following the school day. Afterschool clubs are often divided by age groups. Afterschool clubs aim to complement the learning and development that occurs during the school day and to extend learning during non-school hours. They are often a part of a broader after-school initiative and may have a wide variety of partners and resources that support the program operation. This club type is often facilitated by paid staff and/or volunteers. The schedule complements the school calendar.

**Site-based Club** is designed to reach underserved youth in the communities where they live with year long programming. This could be a public housing site or neighborhood with a community center that can serve as the hosting location.

Clubs can be divided out by ages as well. When doing this consider social, intellectual, emotional and physical growth, as well as the interest of the members.

## What is all of this about projects?

A part of 4-H is learning life skills through specific content. A listing of all projects youth can select are included in a publication called [\*Choose Your Adventure\*](#). Project webpages and “Hot Sheets” support each project area. All of this is available online at

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/projects-list>

County Extension offices have print copies of *Choose Your Adventure* and can print out copies of project Hot Sheets for families who do not have internet access.

The Hot Sheets include links to 4-H curriculum that supports that specific project area. Some county Extension offices purchase these additional curricula for members or have copies of the curricula that they loan out. Check with your county Extension office for local policy.

## Are there dues for 4-H members?

4-H club members are charged a program development fee, usually about \$30 per member. The exact amount is determined by the County Extension Council. In addition, some clubs may decide to pay for local club program costs by assessing a small fee per member or by working together on a fundraising project. Special events such as camps and county fairs may also have registration or entry fees connected to them. If a club volunteer feels a family cannot afford the amount, county 4-H Foundations or the Iowa 4-H Foundation will be able to assist with this fee. No child will be denied access to the 4-H program because of financial challenges.

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## What about insurance?

4-H volunteers who have gone through child protection screening, attended training, and been approved by their county Extension council have liability coverage provided by their County Agricultural Extension District. This coverage is in effect when volunteers are acting within the scope of their volunteer duties and responsibilities in providing education, training, counseling, and specific other services when leading a 4-H group or 4-H activity (contact county extension office for additional details). All county Extension offices are expected to carry accident insurance for members and volunteers. This insurance covers you and your 4-H members from the time you leave home until you return home from any 4-H activity. Additional accident insurance is also available for special activities or events on a per-day basis. Check with your county Extension office for those events and activities that need extra insurance. Forms for each of these plans can be obtained at your county office of Iowa State University Extension & Outreach. They should be sent directly to the insurance company by the 4-H volunteer.



## Where will our club meet?

Where your club meets will probably be determined by the number of members. Meeting places could be public school buildings, churches, fairgrounds, etc. Most schools, communities, and other groups are willing to let their facilities be used for 4-H activities.

## How often will our club meet?

There are several possibilities in choosing a day and time for club meetings, such as:

- once a week, after school (this works well for elementary age members)
- once every 2 weeks, after school or on a weeknight
- once a month, on a weeknight
- once a month, on a Saturday or Sunday (sometimes this works best for clubs with members of a wide age span)
- other variations, limited only by the needs of your club members

It is required that a 4-H club be involved in at least six hours of educational programming during the year, more if desired or needed. This provides continuity for the club as well as time for development and accomplishment of individual and club goals.

Some projects can be taught on a short-term or seasonal basis. Members can enroll at any time during the year. Some clubs start at the beginning of the school year but may plan to meet later for a shorter period of time, perhaps for a 3- or 6-month time period.

## Enrollment Guidelines

The club educational program can be general or offer a specific topic of interest. Youth may be of all grades or a focused grade group.

A 4-H Club and its members will:

- Build youth and adult partnerships.
- Set goals and measure progress toward those goals.
- Plan a fun experiential-based program where youth learn skills in leadership, citizenship, communications, and project work and where all youth
  - Attend meetings/workshops/camps, etc.
  - Complete a service learning project
  - Demonstrate learning by giving a presentation or demonstration before a group
  - Keep records of activities and evaluate experiences

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4-H adult volunteers will:

- Complete a volunteer application and background screening as per volunteer role. (Your county Extension office has these forms.)
- Foster and promote the Needs of Youth and the outcomes of the 4-H experience as defined in Iowa's 4-H Equation.
- Promote positive youth development environments for youth that emphasize youth strengths.
- Complete new volunteer orientation and training.
- Complete the campus generated 4-H volunteer training each year for general/organizational, project volunteers and assistant volunteers, and Clover Kids volunteers.
- Engage parents in the 4-H experience
- Provide appropriate supervision of activities/meetings/field trips, etc.
- Develop working relationships with a variety of community partners.

### Action Steps

- ◆ With the other volunteers, develop your member recruitment plan.
- ◆ Decide on the volunteer and member materials you will need to order or access from online or your county Extension office.
- ◆ Decide how potential club and/or project costs will be handled.
- ◆ Meet with members, parents, and other volunteers to discuss where the club will meet and how often.
- ◆ Talk with your county Extension staff about insurance coverage.
- ◆ Attend scheduled volunteer training(s), as appropriate.

### Reference materials

Accident insurance flyer from American Income Life: available at your county Extension office.  
4-H *Participation Policy* 4-H 14  
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4H/Documents/Policies4H14ParticipationPolicy.pdf>  
4-H Clubs and Clubs Guide  
<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/4hclubs>

### How can I use this information:

1. New activities to plan into our club program:  
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2. Other people who could help us and how they might help:  
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3. Questions to ask county Extension staff and other leaders.  
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This is an adaptation of an Oregon State University publication that was prepared by Mary Alice Dodd, 4-H volunteer leader, Linn County; Lyla Houglum, 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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