



Definitions and Requirements of Iowa 4-H Clubs: Creating Vibrant Learning Communities

Introduction

This document defines expectations for the development and support of learning communities across the state for county extension staff, extension council members, county 4-H youth teams, families, volunteers, and youth. The goal is to reaffirm the requirements of all Iowa 4-H Clover Kids and Iowa 4-H Clubs, which should be learning communities.

¹The defining quality of a learning community is a culture of learning, in which everyone is involved in a collective effort of understanding. Successful learning communities – and successful 4-H clubs – have the following characteristics:

- **Connect people** to purposefully build a sense of community and establish a community identity;
- **Embrace diversity of expertise and experiences** within the group;
- **Foster a culture of shared learning** through collaborative and active learning experiences;
- **Set common goals**, develop standards to measure quality work, provide ample opportunities for reflection, and assess individual and group progress toward those goals;
- **Share knowledge** and question learning through respectful discussion and feedback between group members;
- **Support distributed leadership** by providing a range of leadership roles and skill building activities;
- **Value all members of the group** and allow them to participate to the extent possible.

Truly successful and innovative learning communities² (including Iowa 4-H Clover Kids and Iowa 4-H Clubs) advance the collective knowledge of the community as a way to help individual members learn.

The format shall allow 4-H'ers the freedom to control their club experience to best meet their personal goals and developmental needs, while remaining true to 4-H values and youth development principles.

¹ Bielaczyc, K., & Collins, A. (1999). Learning Communities in Classrooms: A Reconceptualization of Educational Practice

² Learning communities are not a new concept; they are an integral part of Iowa State University's educational model. Since 1995 Iowa State has served over 62,000 students through learning communities. Today Iowa State offers more than 80 learning communities, and over 70 percent of first-year students participate.

Iowa 4-H Mission and Vision

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach provides education and partnerships designed to solve today's problems and prepare for the future. We serve as a 99-county campus, connecting the needs of Iowans with Iowa State University research and resources. We want a strong Iowa.

Iowa 4-H Mission: 4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential through youth-adult partnerships and research-based experiences.

Iowa 4-H Vision: Preparing Iowa's youth to be successful, contributing members of society.

Defining Iowa 4-H Learning Communities

Iowa 4-H groups and clubs are youth/adult learning communities³ that

- Are entrenched in the positive youth development model;
- Use experiential learning—learning by doing—as a primary teaching approach;
- Use ISU Extension and Outreach 4-H Youth Development approved programs, curricula, and procedures that are based in research, culturally relevant, and developmentally appropriate;
- Include planned opportunities to learn and apply life skills such as goal setting, service learning, public speaking, and working in the context of diversity;
- Provide individual project experiences to develop in-depth knowledge about citizenship and leadership, communication and the arts, healthy living, and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); provide members and volunteers access to resources of land-grant universities and to county, state, and national 4-H opportunities;
- Foster youth-adult partnerships that encourage active involvement and participation by youth and adults;
- Provide safe and healthy physical and emotional environments;
- Offer projects in one or more subject matter areas relevant to the land grant university knowledge base to meet youth needs and interests.

Defining Clover Kids Learning Communities

The overall purpose of the 4-H Clover Kids program is to foster the development of life skills that are essential for the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical maturation of kindergarten through 3rd grade youth by providing a unique, age-appropriate educational opportunity. Clover Kids learning communities are considered a short-term, special interest opportunity by Federal definition, must follow the national and state policies, and be chartered, which will enable them to use the 4-H Name and Emblem.

³ Bielaczyc, K., & Collins, A. (1999). Learning Communities in Classrooms: A Reconceptualization of Educational Practice

Defining 4-H Clubs

A 4-H club is an organized learning community who meet regularly with adult volunteers or staff for a long-term, progressive series of educational experiences.

The 4-H club experience has at its core positive youth development experiential learning opportunities, in partnership with caring adults, that assist young people in becoming competent, caring, contributing, confident, connected, and capable⁴. These experiences involve meeting the four needs of youth⁵, fostering the eight essential elements⁶, and achieving community and life skill outcomes. This is accomplished by establishing clubs as vibrant and sustainable learning communities that coalesce around one or more commonalities of interest, geography, age, or any other appropriate criteria; and with a primary function of group and individual learning centered on shared goals.

Iowa 4-H Club Structure

The 4-H club/learning community structure is intended to be flexible, but must

- Enroll at least five youth members from at least three families;
- Conduct a minimum of six regular learning community gatherings per year, with many holding nine to 12 regular activities throughout most or all of the year (Gatherings often include but are not limited to business meetings, project meetings, camps, fairs, service learning opportunities, and other 4-H learning activities.⁷);
- Select youth leaders to provide direction to the club with shared youth leadership opportunities with shared decision-making, with agreed-upon rules or bylaws;
- Keep project, meeting, and financial records;
- Be advised by adult staff or volunteers who have been screened and trained.

Chartering of 4-H Clubs

A 4-H club must be chartered by the ISU Extension and Outreach State 4-H office to be recognized as part of 4-H, and to be authorized to use the 4-H Name and Emblem. The State 4-H program maintains documentation on the issuance of charters to 4-H clubs and notifies 4-H National Headquarters. The decision whether or not to charter a potential club is at the discretion of the State 4-H program office and will not be reviewed by National 4-H Headquarters. Charters must be renewed every three years. (See Iowa 4-H Chartering Process.) *Anticipated Winter 2016-2017*

⁴ Lerner et al, 2005

⁵ Brendtro et al, 1992

⁶ National 4-H Headquarters, 2001

⁷ USDA Fact Sheet, What is a 4-H Club, January 2011

Positive Youth Development

Iowa 4-H Youth Development programs address the needs of young people by focusing on their strengths and capacities and the essential elements of positive youth development programming. When connecting youth to positive experiences, programs should include the following principles:

- All youth have the capacity for positive growth and development.
- Positive youth development is an intentional process. It is proactive to promote protective/resiliency factors in young people.
- Youth assets are both acknowledged and employed through positive youth development.
- Positive youth development enables youth to thrive and flourish, and prepares them for a healthy, happy, and safe adulthood.
- Positive youth development involves youth as active agents. Adults may set the structure, but youth are not just the recipients of services. Youth are valued and encouraged to bring their assets to the table. Adults and youth work in partnership.
- Youth leadership development is a part of positive youth development. Youth should attend, actively participate, contribute, or lead through positive youth development activities.
- Positive youth development involves civic involvement and civic engagement – youth contribute through service learning to their communities.
- Positive youth development involves and engages every element of the community – schools, homes, community members, and others. Young people are valued through this process.
- Positive youth development is an investment that communities make in young people.

4-H Name and Emblem

Responsibility and stewardship for the 4-H Name and Emblem are held in trust by the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture for the educational and character-building purposes of the 4-H program and can be used only as authorized by the statute and according to the authorization of the Secretary or 4-H National Headquarters. In Iowa, ISU Extension and Outreach 4-H Youth Development is the designated authority for the state. The State 4-H office determines appropriate policies and practices in accordance with federal regulations, state and local policies, and university regulations.

The 4-H Name and Emblem are officially protected by the United States government under Title 18 U.S. Code 707. The situations in which they may be used, the manner in which they may be displayed, and the text style and colors required for reproduction are all specified. 4-H clubs must meet these standards when using the 4-H Name and Emblem. Members and volunteers of chartered 4-H clubs are permitted to use the 4-H Name and Emblem. Guidelines for using the 4-H Name and Emblem can be found on the 4-H National Headquarters website at <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/4-h-name-and-emblem>.

Iowa State University 4-H Statement on Diversity

Iowa State University, including ISU Extension and Outreach 4-H Youth Development, is a diverse community of people of all genders, ages, cultures, races, religions, sexual orientations, socio-economic backgrounds, and abilities. Iowa State and its programs celebrate and advance diversity by creating a safe place in which people can express themselves freely and share their unique talents. This diversity of talents enriches our campus by fueling creativity, innovation, and success. Diversity encompasses acceptance and respect by fostering an environment of inclusion that moves beyond simple tolerance to recognizing the richness in individual identities of people. Diversity, therefore, is an active process that requires our continuous dedication to promote the success of present and future generations of students, faculty, and staff. (See [https://www.diversity.iastate.edu/.](https://www.diversity.iastate.edu/))

Policy Domain

All State and County Extension and Outreach staff and volunteers representing the Iowa State 4-H program have the responsibility to support and implement State 4-H Program Policy. 4-H participants and families are responsible for following the policy and code of conduct. County or Club policies will not contradict, violate, supersede, or narrow ISU Extension and Outreach 4-H Youth Development or National 4-H policies.