

# GOAL-CENTERED LEARNING

## PROJECT AREAS, GOALS, EXHIBITS, AND EVALUATION



### HOW THE PIECES FIT TOGETHER

#### Introduction

The purpose of this document is to articulate the relationship between 4-H project areas, goals, exhibits, and evaluation when a 4-H member chooses to exhibit at a County Fair. It also seeks to clarify the philosophy of the Iowa 4-H Youth Development Program to staff, county fair judges, and other adults about the balance we attempt to achieve between goal-centered learning and exhibit standards.

The skill of goal setting and working to achieve a goal is something 4-H strives to teach and practice in all parts of the educational program. How can adults help 4-H members understand how project area goals relate to exhibits goals, how exhibits are evaluated by judges, and how these pieces fit together? Parents and volunteers help 4-H members learn how to set goals and help them find ways to demonstrate their learning through an exhibit. Judges help 4-H members think about which standards apply to their exhibits based on their goals and then discuss how well the 4-H member met those standards.

### PROJECTS

The word “project” gets used in a variety of ways among staff and clientele. In the big picture view, a “project area” is an area of interest selected by a member. Examples of project areas include Food & Nutrition, Photography, Beef, Outdoor Adventures, etc.

Ideally, members select project areas to enroll in at the beginning of the 4-H year and set goals in each one of their selected project areas. What a member learns during the year while reaching their goals can be shared with others by exhibiting at a county fair. This is NOT the only way to share what a member learns, but it is a common way. If exhibiting at the County Fair, members will select the best department, division, and class to enter based upon the learning goal. These are listed in county fair/premium books.

### GOALS

#### Helping 4-H Members Set Goals

Think of the process as being like planning a vacation. Where you want to go is the goal. Using your favorite search engine, you will find there are many routes to get there. The route chosen is the action plan. After returning home, others will probably ask, “How did it go?” That is like the judging experience. How that question gets answered will depend not only on the goal but also the standards you used. Was the vacation supposed to be fun? Educational? Involve family bonding time? Relaxing? Active? Each of us may have different standards that define what a “good” vacation experience is like.

A goal helps a member decide what they want to do and learn in a 4-H project area. A goal is also like having a road map. It helps the member decide how to get to where they want to go.

There are several different types of goals. In 4-H, we encourage youth to set learning goals. They are simple and have three parts:

1. the action or “I want to learn”
2. the result, or the what, and
3. the timetable

For example, for the goal, “I want to learn to take group photos before graduation,” “I want to learn” is the action portion of the goal. What a 4-H member intends to do is the result – “to take group photos.” The timetable is when the goal will be completed – “before graduation.”

A goal should also pass the “control test.” Does the 4-H member have control over what he or she wants to do? Does the action statement of the 4-H member’s goal refer to what he or she wants to learn? A 4-H member has control over a goal such as “I will learn to program a robot by March.” However, if the action mentioned in the goal is what someone else will do, it does not pass the control test. The goal statement “I will have the champion robotics team at the Iowa State Fair” does not pass the control test because the judges provide the action that decides which team will become the champions.

There are resources available to help members learn how to set goals. The publication Project Area or Exhibit (<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/15835>) explains the difference between project areas and exhibits. Additional goal-setting resources are available in the Extension Store (<https://store.extension.iastate.edu>).

The project area guides (<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/ProductList?CategoryID=143>) all have learning ideas under the section “Ideas for Project Area Learning.” They give guidance to what is appropriate for most youth to learn about at different ages related to the project area.

Many project areas have Tip Sheets that share what specific criteria and standards should be met by exhibits in that project area. A link to these resources is available on the State Fair 4-H Static Exhibits webpage (<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/state-fair-4-h-static-exhibits-handbook>).

## **JUDGING**

Helping a 4-H member prepare for the judging experience begins with reviewing the member’s exhibit goals. These goals form the basis for the evaluation process. A 4-H member can demonstrate learning by the ability to explain, to apply information, and by the product itself. The judge will use the appropriate standards that relate to the member’s goals and exhibit as the basis to evaluate the demonstrated learning.

## **CRITERIA**

In evaluating exhibits, three major criteria are considered. The criteria are the set of categories that are used in the evaluation of an exhibit. The criteria are:

1. Learning involved.
  - Decision-making process used, how problems were solved, new skills developed, how gathered information was used, etc.
2. Workmanship and techniques.
  - If the exhibit is an actual product: construction suitable for intended use, directions/guidelines followed appropriately, the suitability of materials, an appropriate finish, etc.
  - If the exhibit shares an idea: accurate information, complete, organized, original, creative, practical, clearly communicated, etc.
3. General appearance and design.
  - Neat and attractive.
  - Application of design elements and principles where suitable.
  - Communicates an intended idea when appropriate.

## STANDARDS

If the word standard is looked up in the dictionary, at least nine different definitions appear. In this discussion of the Iowa 4-H fair judging experience, a standard is a measure of quality or generally accepted principles or techniques. It is most often applied to the workmanship and technique criteria.

The judge uses standards that are appropriate based on the 4-H member's exhibit goals. Remember, the judge is not judging the goals but judging the progress toward the goals. This judging philosophy emphasizes the growth and learning process that occurs as the 4-H member creates the exhibit and is involved in the exhibit experience. The judge will start with the 4-H member's goal then select the appropriate standards.

4-H believes that the member needs to be an active partner in the evaluation process. Part of the skill-building process is that 4-H members will learn about standards and how they relate to their exhibit goals. As 4-H members become more experienced and knowledgeable in their project area, they will set higher standards for their own work.

Standards for many project areas are available on the exhibit tip sheets, available on the State Fair 4-H Static Exhibits webpage (<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/state-fair-4-h-static-exhibits-handbook>).

## MORE ABOUT STANDARDS – HOW THEY FIT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

Most standards are developed over time, experience, and new research. They have solid justifications but may not be applied to ALL situations. Other standards, however, are essential. Consider, for example, standards for food preservation necessary for food safety reasons or correct wiring procedures for electrical safety. These are standards that are consistent with the fundamental structure and safety of the subject matter.

1. When standards are used in 4-H judging, appropriate questions to ask might be:
2. Why is this standard used?
3. Who set this standard?
4. Where did this standard come from?
5. What will the use of this standard do to or for the exhibit?

Asking these questions will help determine whether or not the standard is essential.

Some standards are set by society through an agency of government for the protection of all (an example would be standards necessary to pass a test for a driver's license), some by professional or trade associations for entrance into the group, some by a particular type of employer, or some by a leader of a 4-H club. Some standards may be set by the 4-H member. Answering the three questions may help to avoid those standards that are arbitrary and a possible hindrance in the learning process.

Let's look at an example—a 4-H member purchases a quilt at a garage sale that is finished except for the binding. The member's exhibit goal was to learn how to place a binding around this quilt by the county fair. Which of the following standards would the judge apply to this exhibit?

- a. Quilt blocks all squared with angles matching perfectly.
- b. Colors used are appealing and reflect good design choices.
- c. Fabric textures, weight, and content are appropriate for use.
- d. Binding was applied neatly, with even stitches, corners mitered, and all raw edges are hidden.
- e. All of the above.

While all of the above standards could indeed be applied to a quilt exhibit, the member's goal was to learn about binding a quilt. Letter "D" is the standard that should be applied. None of the other standards would apply to this quilt exhibit. However, if pins were left all over the quilt – then an

essential safety standard would apply. While a judge might discuss other quilting standards with the member to further the member's learning, the ribbon placing should be placed on standard "D" above.

Let's look at another example. The member's goal is to learn how to preserve a clear jelly by July 15. The member chooses to exhibit jars of jelly to demonstrate their learning. Which of the following standards should the judge apply?

- a. Amount of headspace as indicated by USDA materials.
- b. Jelly appears clear.
- c. Proper food processing time for the product, according to USDA.
- d. USDA approved techniques for preparing jars for preservation.
- e. All of the above.

In this case, the item letter "e" would be the correct answer. While items "a," "c," and "d" do not relate directly to the member's goal, they are still used because they are essential standards – in this case, a food safety issue.

## **JUDGES PROVIDE FEEDBACK**

As the exhibit is being evaluated against the appropriate standards, the judge provides feedback to the 4-H member. The judge's feedback indicates how closely the exhibit comes to the appropriate standards. Categories may be excellent, good, fair, poor, okay, needs improvement, etc. The judge also needs to consider the age and experience of the exhibitor, if known. An older, more experienced 4-H member would be expected to meet more of the standards than a younger, less experienced 4-H member with a similar exhibit.

4-H is open to all youth. Some youth may need extra guidance or encouragement from judges to help them communicate the goals they have set and the learning they have accomplished, whether because of developmental needs, language barriers, or cultural differences. Judges will adjust standards and criteria to reflect the ability of the youth.

Because the evaluation of exhibits is a part of a member's learning experience, if a member's exhibit is selected for the state fair, they should have the opportunity to improve the exhibit before it is exhibited at a higher level. This opportunity supports the 4-H member in trying to reach or more nearly accomplish their goal, thus enhancing the overall learning experience.

## **WHAT IS CONFERENCE JUDGING?**

Conference judging is when a judge and 4-H member meet and discuss one on one the 4-H member's exhibit. As part of the conference judging process, 4-H members are asked to come prepared to answer the following questions:

1. What did you plan to learn or do? (What was your exhibit goal(s)?)
2. What steps did you take to learn or do this? Explain what you did so it is easily understood.  
The judge wants to know and understand the steps you used to make your exhibit.
3. What were the most important things you learned?

As a result of the judging experience, expect a 4-H member to:

- Feel good about the experience
- Gain knowledge about the exhibit and themselves
- Be empowered to do self-evaluation and set new goals
- Receive recognition

To achieve these outcomes during the exhibit evaluation experience, judges will build rapport, gather information, encourage self-evaluation and reflection, provide feedback, and guide the 4-H member in planning for the future.

## **BUILD RAPPORT**

In any conference judging setting, judges will first build rapport using the 4-H member's name and maintaining eye contact.

For example,

**Judge:** Hi Don, I'm Sharon, and I'm going to visit with you about your exhibit and what you learned.

## **GATHER INFORMATION**

The judge will read and review information (written, video, audio, or other) provided by the 4-H member. Next, a judge will gather as much information as possible by asking open-ended questions such as: What were your goals? How did you go about working toward your goals? What were the most important things you learned as you worked toward your goals? The judge will listen carefully to what the 4-H member says and let the answers help determine the next questions. This is called "tracking." It demonstrates that the judge is listening and interested in the 4-H member and gives value to what the 4-H member chooses to share. The judge will ask questions that will help the 4-H member share more knowledge.

Judges consider the age and experience level as they ask questions. Judges know that when working with young or beginning members, "what," and "where" questions help them express their knowledge and source of information.

As members mature in age and experience, "how" and "why" questions become more important in helping members think about more abstract concepts and/or applying concepts.

## **ENCOURAGE SELF EVALUATION AND REFLECTION**

Self-evaluation and reflection help youth develop skills in measuring their own progress. This is a learned skill, and some youth will need more direct guidance than others in the process. As youth measure their own progress, they can take on more responsibility for their own learning. By actively involving the 4-H members in the evaluation process in a way that allows them to identify problems and generate solutions, they are more likely to understand the problem and try solutions. Self-evaluation can increase the youth's decision-making skills and encourage new ways to learn.

Here are some tips on how to encourage self-evaluation.

- Allow 4-H members to talk about the criteria and their self-imposed standards.
- Encourage 4-H members to show examples of work they are proud of and work they would like to change.
- Allow 4-H members to reflect on not only what they learned about the exhibit but also what they learned about themselves as they completed the exhibit.
- Use questions to guide the 4-H members through this process.

## PROVIDE SPECIFIC FEEDBACK

Eventually, a judge reaches the point where he or she needs to make specific comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the exhibit. Feedback is often classified as negative or positive. Another way of viewing it is to classify it as supportive or constructive. Supportive feedback reinforces ongoing behavior. Constructive feedback indicates a change is appropriate. By thinking of feedback in this way, all feedback can be useful. As we think about young people, the purpose of all feedback should be to assist them in maintaining or enhancing their present levels of effectiveness or appropriate behavior.

When providing feedback, a judge will:

- Be attentive. Orient their body toward the 4-H member and look at them.
- Initiate the interaction pleasantly. Start out with praise, empathy, or pleasant comments.
- Give feedback in specific terms without being judgmental, personal, or emotional.
- Give rationales. Unless the reasons are obvious, tell the 4-H member why the method/choice is important to merit the judge's feedback.
- Be open to ideas or suggestions from the 4-H member, offer constructive alternatives as needed.
- Ask the member if they understand or have questions.
- Thank the 4-H member for listening.
- Supply written feedback if requested.

Example:

**Judge:** I think you have done an excellent job of assembling the first aid equipment you need, and you have paid attention to details. It is always good to think about ways to improve an already good idea.

**Judge:** Now, just in case someone else might need to find the first aid kit, I think it would be helpful if you would label it somehow on the outside. What do you think, Katie?

**4-H member:** Yeah, I guess that might be better. My little sister could find it easier if she was supposed to go get it.

**Judge:** How do you think you would label it?

**4-H member:** I could write on it with a wide felt tip pen or maybe use paint and draw a picture of a first aid symbol.

**Judge:** Those are both excellent ideas.

You will need to think about what will hold up the best, by considering where it will be used.

## LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Conference judging may be an opportunity for judges to ask youth to look to the future and set new goals that may or may not be used in 4-H project area work. The focus for the future should be action (e.g., where else the 4-H member might use this information or skill, what new information or skill the person might want to learn or develop, or where the 4-H member might gain a new skill or information).

Older members may be more capable of thinking of an application for the future because they deal in more abstract terms. Judges working with younger members may need to be more concrete. An effective judge encourages 4-H members to reflect on what they have done with their exhibits and how they would like to change them.

An effective judge helps an exhibitor self-evaluate by asking questions that will help the 4-H member describe how they feel about the product. Here are some examples.

**Judge:** Has the kit helped you find the first aid supplies easier?

**Judge:** Besides containing all the needed supplies, how else did you evaluate your kit?

**Judge:** It appears you gave a lot of thought to what you wanted in the first aid kit. How happy are you with it now that you've used it?

As a result of this self-evaluation process, members can begin to set new, more challenging goals for the following year.

## **RECOGNITION**

At the end of the exhibit evaluation process, the judge awards a ribbon placing for the exhibit based on the information the 4-H member provided in writing and/or during the conference judging conversation. This includes the 4-H member's progress toward goals, how they created the exhibit, what they learned, and standards appropriate for the exhibit. Judges should take care to not say or imply that the ribbon placing is for the 4-H member. Members are not being evaluated.

## **SUMMARY**

All adults, parents, leaders, and judges play important roles in ensuring that conference judging is a significant growth experience for youth.

The contact with a judge may last only a few minutes. Still, it's an opportunity to make a real difference to a 4-H member. A sharp tone or overly critical statement that puts personal preferences above objective standards can stay with a 4-H member for a very, very long time and can discourage them from ever exhibiting in that project area again. It can even cause them to drop out of 4-H.

Likewise, how volunteers and parents deal with negative experiences also impacts how the member views and will remember the experience. When a caring adult helps a member realize that the conference judging experience is one person's viewpoint on one day and encourages a member to keep that in perspective, it too will help that individual for a lifetime. While judges are trained and should be respected and use commonly agreed upon standards, different judges may think through things differently. Using all feedback, both supportive and constructive, to make the best better is a cornerstone of 4-H! Let's all work together to achieve that goal!

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