

**STEPS FOR ORGANIZING A 4-H CLUB**

**STEP 1: Contact the County 4-H Agent**

The 4-H agent is your main source of help and the link to the county, state and national policies and guidelines. He or she is located in the 4-H/Cooperative Extension Office in your county or city. The 4-H agent will help get your club started and support you in managing the club. You can expect help in solving problems that arise, advocating for the growth of the club and individual members, providing professional development training, and gathering the curricula and resources you need. Your 4-H agent will also connect you with additional opportunities for youth and volunteers that are available through Extension. These opportunities might include:

* volunteer/leader training opportunities
* recognition opportunities for both volunteers and youth
* county and state competitive and noncompetitive activities and programs, such as fairs

and conferences

* national events and experiences
* information on scholarships or small grants for individuals or groups

**STEP 2: Complete 4-H Volunteer Application, Volunteer Agreement Form, and Confidentiality Form.**

**STEP 3: Complete 4-H volunteer enrollment at** [**http://www.4honline.com**](http://www.4honline.com)

**STEP 4: Attend local 4-H volunteer/leader training**

By attending local 4-H volunteer/leader training you will learn about policies and procedures of

the county program, as well as specific 4-H opportunities in that county and state. Participation

in training also offers you the opportunity to network with other 4-H club leaders and the county

4-H staff and to receive and review training on principles of youth development, the experiential

learning model and specific 4-H curricula.

**STEP 5: Obtain county and state 4-H policies and guidelines**

The 4-H 101 manual provides national 4-H policy on name, emblem, chartering, etc. It is

important that you work closely with the 4-H agent to ensure that you are following the proper

guidelines for your county. Obtaining these policies will inform you on issues related to

enrollment, how to charter clubs, appropriate use of the 4-H name and emblem, if the county

4-H program charges member fees, how to obtain curricula, etc.

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**STEP 6: Assess youth, parent and community needs and interests**

As a youth development professional, you probably have a good sense of the needs and

interests of youth currently living in your community. You may also be familiar with the kinds

of activities parents want for their children and the other out-of school options available for

youth. All of these factors will give you direction in determining the kind of club that will meet

youths’ and parents’ needs. Before starting your 4-H club, meet with potential members to get

their input into understanding the demographics of your community. Determine what days and

times are best for meetings, what age groups are interested, and finally, consider what youth

programming efforts are currently offered.

**Step 7: Recruit potential club members**

Based upon your assessment of the community, identify potential youth and their families and

invite them to an “exploring possibilities” meeting for the entire family. Be very upbeat about

4-H in this invitation and remember that before you start “spreading the word,” you need to

have a thorough understanding of what an exciting, appealing program you have to offer. Your

enthusiasm is the key to any marketing efforts. Plan your presentation about 4-H based upon

what you have learned about the demographics of your community. Talk a little bit about

4-H and then ask your audience lots of questions. What are youths’ and families’ interests and

needs? How can you match their interests with the options available through 4-H? Plan your

presentation to answer questions youth often ask. Some of these questions might include:

* Why should I join 4-H?
* Can my friends join too?
* What will we do that is fun?
* Can I stay in 4-H if I move?
* Will I be able to help plan club activities?
* What will I learn?
* How much will it cost?

Young people join groups to have fun, do interesting things, meet other youth, and have new

experiences. They even want to learn new skills. You will need to show that a 4-H club offers a

way to do all these things. Remember that 4-H projects are all designed to be very adaptable.

For example, if you find that youth want to do hiking and canoeing, that could be the primary

focus of a community club – or it could be an important aspect of a photography project/group

that documents the trip. Community resources can be incorporated into your 4-H program. If

youth want to hike, team them with community members who have access to Global Positioning

Systems for a great learning experience. A 4-H Citizenship Club might want to do a community

clean-up project or work with another community group in an existing community service activity. The county 4-H program may have teen ambassadors who could partner with teens in your club who are new to 4-H.

At your exploratory meeting, you will also want to gather some information from those attending

that will help you with the next step in forming a club. Record the interests of the group. This will

help you identify the curriculum materials that support these interests so that you can have them

ready to share with the club at their first meeting. Find out what days and times for meetings

work best with this particular group. Determine if any of the adults attending the meeting

would be interested in serving as leaders of the group. Find out the best means for contacting

the youth and adults attending this meeting regarding future meetings. You will want to leave

the meeting with a complete roster of names, street addresses, phone numbers and e-mail

addresses. If sufficient interest is shown in starting a club at this meeting, you are ready to move

on to step 6.

**166 Appendix - Lesson 10 4-H 101 Lessons**

**STEP 8: Conduct an organizational meeting**

Recruit an adult volunteer to serve as the club leader for your new club before holding the first

meeting. With that leader, plan and schedule an organizational meeting for the club. Invite

all the youth and parents who showed interest in joining the club at your exploratory meeting

and encourage them to invite interested friends. A description of an effective 4-H meeting is

included in Lesson 11. Use that information to prepare for this first meeting. In general, you will

want to:

* Prepare a welcoming space with plenty of room to do some interactive activities.
* Greet youth and families as they arrive and introduce people to one another. Lead an

introductory group-building activity to begin building trust.

* Share the conducting of the meeting with the new club leader.
* Help the group to determine whether they want a single-project or multi-project club. By

using the interest survey you took at the exploratory meeting you can be prepared to

share project curricula with the group.

* Work together to develop ground rules or by-laws for the club.
* Decide whether the club will elect officers.
* Do an activity from a project that was identified as one of interest. Youth need to leave

the meeting having done something that makes them want to return.

**STEP 9: Recruit project leader/leaders and distribute curricula**

4-H project leaders can be recruited more easily if they are familiar with the project curricula

and how easy it is to use. Because there are a wide variety of curricula available for your 4-H

Club, there truly is something for everyone. If you are a county 4-H agent, you will want to make sure that you have an up-to-date library at your county office.

**STEP 10: Youth and adult enrollment online at** [**http://www.4honline.com**](http://www.4honline.com) **and other appropriate club forms, request for club charter and reports. (Volunteer adults must go through application and screening process and training.**

Each club is responsible for completing any necessary paperwork and submitting it to the county office as required. Counties must provide an annual report to the state office of the number of youth involved in 4-H and how they are participating. States, in turn, must report to the National 4-H Headquarters at USDA. If you are forming a club within an organization outside Extension, the information your county agent needs for the annual report will help justify the club in your organization as well. Work with your county 4-H agent to determine what paperwork needs to be completed and the due dates.

Data gathered is also used to generate county or state mailing lists for newsletters and

distribution of other pertinent information via postal or electronic mailings to the membership

and volunteers. Enrollment data verifies eligibility requirements for local, state and national

competitions. Photo release and privacy statements explaining how the data will be used are

also frequently included.

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**STEP 11: Assist with club rules or constitution and by-laws preparation**

It is important to make sure that all members of the club agree upon the way the club will

operate. Putting this understanding into writing lessens the chance that conflicts will arise during

the course of the year and assists in handling disagreements that do arise. 4-H clubs typically

prepare rules or by-laws to serve as this written agreement. Constitution and By-laws for 4-H Clubs reflect the standards and procedures that the 4-H club’s members and leaders follow. They describe when and where the club meets, what (if any) officers the club elects, and what criteria are used for a member to remain in good standing. A copy of the club by-laws must be on file with the local 4-H office and is a pre-requisite for most club charters. If changes are made, a new copy must be sent to the local 4-H office.

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