

# Starting a 4-H Club or Group



Welcome to 4-H, the largest out-of-school youth development organization in the United States! The 4-H club experience offers fun, learning, and friendship to everyone involved.

This publication describes basic 4-H club guidelines and offers ideas for holding meetings and recruiting members and volunteers. County 4-H staff at Oregon State University Extension offices are available to answer questions and provide educational support. Don't hesitate to ask for ideas and assistance.

## Getting Started

Positive youth development is what 4-H is all about. This means that volunteers help create environments in which young people can **belong** to a group, **master** skills, practice **generosity**, and learn effective ways to be **independent**.

The following guidelines for a 4-H club help create positive, educational experiences in a safe environment beyond one's family. Clubs should follow these best practices:

- Engage at least five youth to learn together.
- Include youth from three or more families.
- Hold regular meetings (one or more times per month) that include intentional learning.
- Assign a minimum of two approved 4-H volunteers to attend club meetings to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment. *(Additional adult supervision is needed for groups with more than 20 members. See "Volunteering for 4-H" on page 2 for requirements to become a 4-H volunteer.)*
- Have an understanding that the club will not discriminate and will welcome any youth who is interested in learning in 4-H.

## Recruiting 4-H Members

Full membership in 4-H is open to all youth in grades 4 through 12, and 4-H eligibility ends on December 31 of the year in which a young person turns 19. Some special membership conditions can be considered. Your county 4-H staff can answer membership questions.

Children in kindergarten through third grade may be introduced to the 4-H experience by joining an Oregon 4-H Cloverbud group. Cloverbuds sample a variety of activities but do not participate in competitive events or elect club officers.

You may already know of young people in your area who are interested in joining a 4-H club. You can recruit additional members by using some of these ideas:

- Put posters or brochures in your neighborhood, schools, businesses, and youth hangouts.
- Make announcements at schools, community meetings, and other events.
- Ask your county Extension office for names of families who have expressed interested in participating in 4-H.
- Invite interested youth and adults to talk about why they are interested, what they want to learn, and who else may want to join the club.

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## Volunteering for 4-H

Parents, 4-H alumni, neighbors, colleagues, and business people may be willing to volunteer. Experienced teens can help, too. You can recruit volunteers by using the same ideas suggested above for recruiting members.

Oregon 4-H volunteers have many different roles. A few examples are teaching project topics, planning workshops or camps, mentoring club officers, collecting member enrollment information, and teaching other volunteers. Some volunteer for a short time (e.g., chaperone a field trip), and others commit to ongoing service (e.g., meet with 4-H members every month). Whatever the role or commitment, every 4-H volunteer must be ready and able to reinforce positive youth development. All approved 4-H volunteers work under the direction and supervision of Extension staff.

Individuals of different ages, skills, and experience levels are welcome to become 4-H volunteers. But some roles require that a volunteer be a certain age or have specific qualifications. Van drivers, overnight chaperones, shooting sports instructors, and lifeguards are examples of volunteer roles that require more experience and training.

To be approved to work directly with youth three or more times per year, potential 4-H volunteers must submit an application, provide names of three personal references, successfully pass a criminal background check, and participate in a minimum of 2 hours of orientation with county 4-H staff. Once approved, volunteers have the opportunity to learn more about 4-H through online modules, statewide workshops, and ongoing county training.

Approved volunteers help to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment in 4-H. At least one volunteer supervising a club must be 25 or older, and all volunteers must be at least 2 years older than the youth they are supervising.

## Becoming an Official 4-H Club

4-H is offered through the land-grant university in each state. In Oregon, the 4-H Youth Development Program is part of Oregon State University Extension, and every Oregon 4-H member and volunteer must be affiliated (enrolled) with

an Extension office. Your county Extension office can provide enrollment forms for 4-H members and volunteers.

The 4-H year begins October 1 and ends September 30, but clubs may form at any time during the year. Once a club has enrolled, its members reenroll every autumn. New members can join an existing club at any time. Occasionally there are requirements that may prevent a new member from competing in a specific county or state event (e.g., a minimum number of meetings to attend or months of animal ownership).

For the safety and well-being of youth and adults, a chartered club must be supervised by at least two approved volunteers, and one of these volunteers should be 25 or older.

After a 4-H club forms, the county Extension office will issue the club a **charter**. Clubs must be chartered for the purpose of being included under the IRS tax-exemption group ruling for 4-H. (See the National 4-H Headquarters fact sheet, “*Charters: The Key to Official Recognition*.”) To be chartered, 4-H clubs agree to be nondiscriminatory and to follow the guidelines for use of the 4-H name and emblem. (See the National 4-H Headquarters fact sheet, “*Granting Authorization to Use the 4-H Name and Emblem*.”) This documentation means the group is officially recognized as part of the county, state, and national 4-H Youth Development Program.

## 4-H Member Fees

Oregon 4-H members submit state and county 4-H program fees:

- Every member is assessed a small, annual state fee that is submitted to the county 4-H program.
- Most counties assess an additional membership fee that provides accident insurance for members and volunteers participating in 4-H activities and helps defray the cost of managing the county 4-H program and supporting volunteer involvement.

Some clubs decide to pay members’ fees from their club treasury with funds saved from work projects or fundraisers. County 4-H associations may sponsor memberships when the fees are cost prohibitive for an individual or family.

## 4-H Club Meetings

For members to experience belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence, monthly 4-H meetings need to include business, education, and fun (figure 1). Some clubs do all of these things during each monthly meeting. Other clubs hold two meetings each month; they focus on club business, decision making, and public speaking at one meeting and project-specific education at the other.

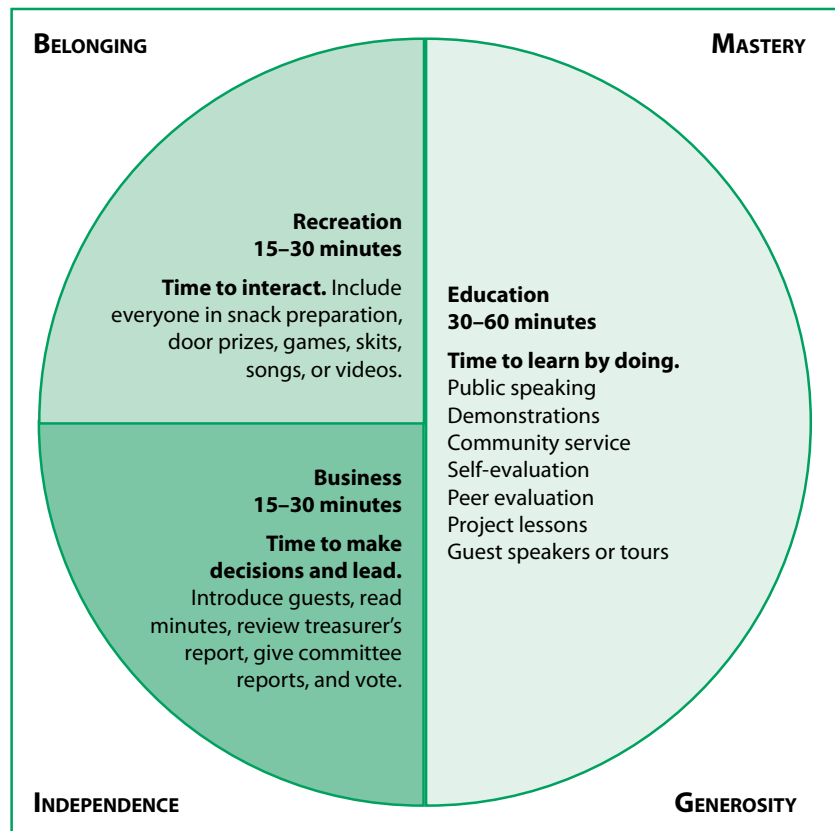
### Location

Club meetings may be held anywhere that is safe and convenient for all members and volunteers. It is important for families participating in the club to have input in choosing a meeting place. Consider how far families need to travel, and choose a location where there is enough space for everyone (including anyone with a disability) to be able to move comfortably.

Some club meetings are held at members' homes so each family has an opportunity to host. Other clubs meet at a volunteer's home where project resources are available (e.g., horse arena, sewing machines, woodworking tools, or flower garden). Other options for meeting places include schools, libraries, community centers, Grange Halls, Extension offices, and buildings at the county fairgrounds.

### Frequency

A club needs to have at least six meetings during the 4-H year (October 1 to September 30) for effective learning. But most clubs meet more often, such as once or twice per month or even weekly. Ask members and families to choose a regular meeting day and time. This keeps planning and communication simple and helps busy families keep 4-H on their calendars. Ask your county Extension office if members must attend a minimum number of club meetings to meet county requirements for submitting award applications or exhibiting at the county fair.



**Figure 1. Suggested plan for a 60- to 90-minute 4-H meeting.** Note that activities support key concepts of positive youth development: belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence.

### Agenda

As a 4-H club is getting started, members might discuss or act on these topics:

- Ideas for a club name  
(A 4-H club name should represent a positive image of 4-H that is not offensive or discriminatory (e.g., not specific to one gender, religious belief, ethnic group, or culture).  
For more information, see the National 4-H Headquarters fact sheet, "Naming a 4-H Club.")
- Topics or projects youth are interested in learning about during the year
- Ways to fund educational and fun 4-H activities (e.g., whether to start a club treasury)
- Whether to form committees for specific items
- Opportunities for members to practice decision making and leadership through club structure

## Club Structure

There are many ways to develop a club structure. 4-H clubs commonly have officers, including president, vice president or president-elect, secretary or reporter, treasurer, recreation chairperson, and parliamentarian. Officers may be elected for the entire 4-H year or for 3 months at a time. Or, officer duties can be assigned to a different member every month or shared by two members. This allows members to learn from one another and share responsibilities.

There are many creative ways for young people to practice decision making and leadership. **It is important for adults not to make decisions for youth during club meetings.** The process of making decisions takes time and requires practice. 4-H volunteers are mentors and guides while youth are learning.

## Learning in 4-H

Members and volunteers can choose to learn about any topic, as long as the learning can occur safely and within the risk management guidelines established by the State 4-H Office. For example, Cloverbuds (kindergarten through third grade) can enjoy learning about small pets but may not be involved with large animal projects (e.g., dog, horse, or beef) because they are not developmentally prepared to manage the animal or consistently practice good judgment for everyone's safety. Another example is that annual 4-H accident insurance covers most educational activities but not activities that are in the air (e.g., airplane lessons or rides).

Project materials for 4-H members and volunteers are listed in the "projects" section of the Oregon 4-H website (<http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/projects>). Some projects have leader guides that provide ideas for teaching methods and learning activities. Explore ideas with your county Extension staff, too. Many 4-H materials are available online or provided at no charge; others are available for a small fee.

## Summary

Starting a 4-H club is exciting for youth and rewarding for volunteers. It is a time to make friends and learn together. There are many people who are willing to help. Start today by contacting your county Extension office.

## Resources

### Oregon 4-H website:

<http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/>

### Fact sheets and information from National 4-H Headquarters:

<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/youthdevelopment4h.cfm>

(To view a fact sheet, click the title below.)

- *Essential Elements of Youth Development*
- *What is a 4-H Club?*
- *Naming a 4-H Club*
- *Charters: The Key to Official Recognition*
- *Granting Authorization to Use the 4-H Name and Emblem*
- *Kindergarten–3rd Grade Programs in 4-H*
- *Developmental Appropriateness*
- *4-H's Public Partnership: USDA & Land-grant Institutions*

### Your county Extension office:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/find-us> or your telephone directory (Look under 4-H, Oregon State University Extension Service, or [County Name] Extension Service.)

Ask for these materials:

- 4-H enrollment forms
- Insurance information
- 4-H project materials
- *Welcome to the World of 4-H: Basics for New Leaders* DVD (PNW 003-DVD)

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