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## **An Introduction to Oregon 4-H Advancement Programs**

4-H advancement programs consist of a series of steps that provide a framework for progressive learning within a specific project area. Advancement programs allow 4-H members to move at their own speed and encourage self-learning that is based on members' interests and abilities. Advancement programs are self-paced, age- and skill-level appropriate, and can be a tremendous help to members as they set their goals each year. In addition, advancement programs are useful to Junior Leaders and more experienced 4-H members who wish to work with younger or less-experienced members.

### **Benefits of 4-H Advancement Programs**

Advancement programs:

- Make projects more interesting
- Assist members in setting and achieving goals
- Encourage self-paced learning
- Help members learn more about their projects
- Encourage age-appropriate skill building
- Provide new, enjoyable experiences
- Help prepare members for participation in certain activities and events
- Provide recognition for work well done
- Provide incentive to members to stay in a project over a longer time period

### **Life Skill Development and 4-H Advancement Programs**

Participation in 4-H advancement programs is instrumental in the development of life skills, a major emphasis of 4-H programming. Young people who participate in 4-H are not just gaining knowledge about their project area, they are also developing skills that will be useful throughout their life. Specifically, the 4-H advancement programs are designed to develop life skills in:

- Learning to learn
- Making decisions
- Keeping records
- Planning and organizing
- Achieving goals
- Completing a project or task
- Communicating
- Being responsible
- Developing self-esteem

### **Recording Progress in the Advancement Program**

Leaders should encourage members to keep the advancement program with their records. Doing so allows leaders and members to evaluate the 4-H experience, review progress, and

establish goals for the future. Upon completing an element, the 4-H member fills in the date and the leader initials the record. Upon completing all the elements of an advancement area, the leader (or other knowledgeable expert) signs and dates the advancement record and initials the advancement completion checklist.

## **Recognizing Advancement**

The National 4-H Recognition Model outlines five different ways in which 4-H members can be recognized.

### **1. Participation**

This type of recognition program emphasizes the importance of acknowledging young people who have been involved in 4-H educational experiences. For some youth, participation in a 4-H learning experience is an accomplishment.

### **2. Progress toward self-set goals**

Parents and other adults can help youth set realistic goals. Recognition for progress toward self-set goals, no matter how small, is an integral part of this type of recognition.

### **3. Achievement of standards of excellence**

Experts in a given area establish standards of excellence. By measuring personal progress against standards of excellence, youth can gain insight into their own efforts and abilities.

### **4. Peer competition**

Peer competition subjectively identifies, in a concrete time and place, the best team or individual. Peer competition is a strong motivator for some youth but is inappropriate for youth under age 8.

### **5. Cooperation**

Learning and working together promotes high achievement. Cooperation takes advantage of all the skills represented in the group and the process the group uses to approach a learning task or goal. Through cooperation, everyone is rewarded.

## **Advancement Certificates**

The 4-H Advancement Program is an excellent way to promote and recognize members' efforts in progressing toward self-set goals and achieving standards of excellence through learning. Advancement certificates that are customized for each project area are available from your county Extension office. Contact a county 4-H staff member to request advancement certificates in your project area.

Earning an advancement certificate deserves recognition. When members have completed a level of advancement, it should be recognized. This can be done at an achievement meeting or other community event. Extension 4-H staff members can also help leaders prepare newspaper and radio press releases about members' achievements.

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## Using the Horse Advancement Program

Advancement programs are written to provide a learning sequence for all members. While youth will progress at different rates through the various steps, it is important that members are continually advancing with their project. To that end, members should complete steps every year.

Much of the information leaders and members need to complete advancement steps can be found in the horse project manuals. In some advanced steps, members will need to refer to other sources.

A knowledgeable person should sign horse advancements. This person may be different for different areas. For example, a club leader or parent may not have the expertise needed to sign advancements for driving, jumping, or cow working. 4-H members should find a person with expertise in the area they are working on to check their advancements.

Many of the horse advancement steps are included for safety reasons. 4-H is committed to teaching its members how to safely handle, ride, and show their animals. 4-H also wants to ensure the safety of others, whether at a club riding meeting or a county fair.

Therefore, to meet youth development goals and safety considerations, the following guidelines are in effect:

### **Mandatory**

- To compete at a county fair in showmanship, members must first complete the Level 1 Ground Work Advancements.
- To compete at a county fair in any riding class, members must first complete the Level 1 Riding Advancements.
- To compete at a county fair in any specialty advancement area (such as jumping or gaming) or any ranch horse advancement area (such as roping or cow working), members must first complete the Level 1 Advancements for that specific area.
- Dad Potter: Before attempting any three-step Dad Potter Certificate of Merit, members must first complete their three selected Dad Potter steps in the Riding Advancements. Members must complete all 10 Dad Potter elements specified in the Riding Advancements before participating in a Dad Potter trial.

### **Recommended**

- By the end of their junior years (usually 6th grade), members should have completed the Level 1 Knowledge, Ground Work, and Riding Advancements.
- By the end of their intermediate years (usually 9th grade), members should have completed the Level 2 Knowledge, Ground Work, and Riding Advancements.
- By the end of their senior years (usually 12th grade), members should have completed the Level 3 Knowledge, Ground Work, and Riding Advancements.
- For showing in specialty advancement areas, intermediate members should have completed Level 2 Advancements in those areas and senior members should have completed Level 3 Advancements in those areas.
- All members should complete at least two personal development options each year.