



4-H VOLUNTEER TRAINING SERIES

How to Start a 4-H Club (for Youth Ages 8-18)



Why Start a 4-H Club?

Being in a 4-H club provides important opportunities for youth to learn subject matter and life skills while working with a caring adult and other youth. Once youth are 4-H members, they become eligible for a variety of the benefits of belonging to 4-H, including awards, trips, special events, etc. Of course, it's meant to be fun for the kids and the leaders too! Starting a 4-H club isn't difficult and you are encouraged to seek help from parents or other volunteers. Local Extension/4-H staff can help you get started.

What is a 4-H Club?

A 4-H Club is an organized group of youth (ages 8-18), guided by an adult, with a planned program that is carried on throughout all or most of the year. Cloverbud groups/clubs operate using different methods. Refer to **4-H Cloverbuds: 4-H for Younger Members***. 4-H clubs may meet in any location and typically have elected officers and a set of rules approved by the membership to govern the club.

Club meetings typically include:

- an educational program driven by youth interests
- a group team-building or recreational activity
- the conducting of some business by the officers

The goals and structure of 4-H clubs vary according to the needs of the members they serve. Some clubs offer one project topic that the entire membership experiences together at the club meeting. Others offer a selection of projects delivered through project meetings held at times outside the club. Some clubs have a singular focus such as community service clubs, or they serve a specific audience such as tribal reservation clubs, after-school or home-school youth. But there are components and characteristics common to all 4-H clubs, and these commonalities provide the definition of a 4-H club. These are a few kinds of clubs:

- *Community-based*—An adult volunteer leader starts a 4-H club in his or her neighborhood with some local children. The club selects one or more projects. The group usually meets about once a month or more at the leader's home, county 4-H office, community center, or other convenient location(s).
- *School-based and After School*—A teacher or other interested adult conducts a club meeting at a designated time during or after class. Activity periods or after school are also possible times. The teacher might select 4-H projects that are relevant to the class and subject(s) being taught, or offer a project "just for fun."
- *Military 4-H clubs* are organized by the Armed Forces, often on military installations, and principally for military dependents.

Who Can Join?

Youth may be enrolled in 4-H clubs and be designated as 4-H club members:

Written by Keith G. Diem, Ph.D., 2005. Adapted by Lindsey McConnell, Ben Knowles, and Judith Levings, for use with Florida 4-H, 2014. Used by permission.

An Equal Opportunity Institution. 4-H is the nation's largest youth development organization. Over 230,000 members in the State of Florida help to make up the community of more than 6.5 million young people across America. 4-H is a non-formal, practical educational program for youth. Florida 4-H is the youth development program of Florida Cooperative Extension, a part of the University of Florida/IFAS.

- when they are age 8 through 18 (as of September 1 of the current 4-H year that spans September 1 through August 31).
- they agree to become actively engaged in carrying out at least one 4-H educational project.
- they agree to actively participate in the meetings, educational programs and activities of the 4-H club.
- when a parent/guardian enrolls each child in 4-H using 4HOnline (<https://florida.4honline.com>). Paper enrollment forms are available for families without internet access (<http://florida4h.org/getinvolved/>). when an adult volunteer working with the club has been approved, following volunteer screening, orientation and training provided by a designated Extension person (usually a 4-H staff member).

Membership in 4-H is offered to all youth, ages 5-18, on an age-appropriate basis, without regard to race, creed, color, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. (This does not mean there is a “quota” system but only that all individuals should be treated equally and fairly.)

Starting a 4-H Club: Step by Step

1. Contact the 4-H staff at your local county UF/IFAS Extension office to let them know you’d like to start a 4-H club and to apply to be a 4-H volunteer. Once you are approved, you may proceed with the following steps.
2. Read information about the 4-H Youth Development Program supplied to you. If you have nothing other than this sheet, obtain what’s available from the 4-H office of UF/IFAS Extension in your county. You will find the entire **4-H Volunteer Training Series***, posted on the state 4-H web site (www.florida4h.org), especially informative.
3. Begin by recruiting several (five or more is usually a good minimum number) interested, eligible children to join the club. Standard 4-H clubs involve youth, ages 8-18, and focus on in-depth learning of one or more projects.
4. Organize your club at the first meeting. If convenient, you may want a separate session for parents. If not, certainly invite parents to the first organizational club meeting. Tell the parents that their help is needed.

(4-H leaders are not merely baby-sitters!) Encourage parents to attend meetings and to become involved whenever and however possible. It’s usually best to make specific requests for help from individuals, based on their interests and abilities. A *Parent Interest Survey* is available to help Leaders determine how parents are willing to assist with the club. However, adult involvement in the club should never overshadow member participation!

The First Meetings

1. What to do at the first meeting (or shortly thereafter):
 - A. Describe available 4-H projects to the members (those you’re willing to lead). Ask members to select, or at least begin to think about, projects to be carried by the club. Review the 4-H curriculum catalog (<http://www.4-hmall.org/Category/4-hcurriculum.aspx>) for ideas and choices.
 - B. Encourage members to choose or begin to think about a name for the club. (Refer to **Selecting a Name for Your 4-H Club***)
 - C. Develop/approve a basic 4-H club constitution. (Refer to **Adopting 4-H Club By-Laws***)
 - D. Ask for nominations and elect officers for the club. Depending on the size and type of club, typical officers might include: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and reporter/historian. You aren’t limited to these positions and also may not need all of them. Many clubs seem to operate fine with a president, vice-president, and secretary-treasurer.
 - E. Parents/guardians will need to enroll each member in 4-H using 4HOnline (<https://florida.4honline.com>). Paper enrollment forms are available for families without internet access (<http://florida4h.org/getinvolved/>).
 - F. Each adult who volunteers to help lead the club will need to complete a 4-H Adult Volunteer Application using 4HOnline (<https://florida.4honline.com/>). Enrollment in 4HOnline is required for these reasons:
 - Members and leaders are provided regular 4-H newsletters and other important information.

- Background screening for volunteers is important for youth protection and to comply with applicable laws.
 - As an organization that receives public funds, certain membership information is required for reports to the government.
 - Most county 4-H programs participate in or sponsor basic accident insurance coverage for enrolled 4-H members.
- G. Decide on a regular club meeting schedule, which includes date, time, and place. Clubs should aim to meet at least once a month for all or most of the year.
2. Obtain necessary materials for 4-H project(s), such as member and leader/project guides and project record books from your county 4-H office or www.florida4h.org if available. To find out about the many national 4-H project materials available from the 4-H Mall or to order online, visit its web site at <http://www.4-hmall.org/Category/4-hcurriculum.aspx>.
 3. If you want more members for your club than you have been able to recruit, let your county 4-H staff know. The staff can write news releases to help recruit additional members, or you can write one yourself. Recruiting can also be done through the 4-H newsletter, web site, and other methods.

Your Club's Success is Important

Once your club is properly established, it qualifies for a 4-H Charter, which officially gives it the right to use the 4-H name and emblem. See **Establishing and Chartering a 4-H Club*** for more information. More information about using the 4-H name and emblem can be found online at www.florida4h.org.

Just as many club members will work to achieve standards, clubs may strive to meet specific *Standards of Excellence*. There are the four levels of standards are available for clubs to achieve. For a description of the clover standards, view the Club Standards of Excellence Application at www.florida4h.org. Check with your local county office for Club Standards in your county.

Ideas & Suggestions

1. It's a good idea to regularly determine how well your club is doing. A helpful tool your club can use to evaluate itself can be found in **How Effective is Your 4-H Club? A Checklist for Success***.
2. Keep in contact with your county 4-H office. Feel free to ask for help or materials. Remember to send a 4-H Club Activity Report regularly. This keeps the 4-H staff informed of your club's activities and may be printed in the county 4-H newsletter or web site so others will know what your club is doing.
3. Share the workload! Recruit co-leaders if desired and direct them to apply to your county 4-H Office to become approved as 4-H volunteers. At the very least, ask for parental support.
4. Review the main points of the most recent county 4-H newsletter (or from county 4-H web page) at club meetings by reading aloud so members will know what's going on in the total 4-H program. Encourage all members to participate in a variety of 4-H activities. Encourage parents as well as members to read the 4-H newsletter.
5. Attend leader meetings, workshops, and forums. This will keep you informed of details about the 4-H program, provide an opportunity to share ideas with other 4-H volunteers and learn from other people's experiences. You might also wish to consider becoming active in the county 4-H Association. You can also subscribe to 4-H volunteer updates via email.
6. Keep your leader information/orientation materials and other 4-H information, such as the 4-H newsletter, "on file" for future reference. Don't forget to visit the state 4-H web site regularly to learn about current 4-H news and resources.
7. Promote pride in 4-H! 4-H flag sets, t-shirts, promotional items and gifts can be ordered from the national 4-H Source Book and online at www.4-hmall.org

Thank you!

Your decision to serve as a volunteer 4-H club leader is sincerely appreciated!

The 4-H program could not exist without your interest.

BEST WISHES IN YOUR EFFORTS!

*Refer to the **4-H Volunteer Training Series** documents located at the Florida 4-H website (<http://Florida4h.org/volunteers>).