



4-H VOLUNTEER TRAINING SERIES

How to Start a 4-H Club (for Youth Ages 8–18)¹



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, and special events. 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,
- group team-building or recreational activity, and
- 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, or they serve a specific audience, such as tribal reservation, 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 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. The teacher might select 4-H projects that are relevant to the class

¹This document is 4H336, one of a series of the 4-H Youth Development Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date July 2014. Reviewed October 2017. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Originals written by K. G. Diem and J. Jordan; and B. Terry, D. Pracht, J. Butterfield, and A. Cletzer. Revised by L. McConnell, and B. Knowles. Adapted from Diem, K. G. (2005). *The ABCs of 4-H: A Primer for 4-H Volunteers*. Clemson Extension/South Carolina 4-H. 4-H Leader Training Series. Adapted with permission. Also adapted from Jordan, J., Terry, B., Pracht, D., Butterfield, J., and Cletzer, A. (2009). *Starting and Maintaining 4-H Clubs*, UF/IFAS EDIS Publication #4H GC 00 (DLN 291). Adapted with permission.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

and subject(s) being taught or offer a project just for fun.

- *Military 4-H Clubs*—These are organized by the Armed Forces, often on military installations, and are intended principally for military dependents.

Who Can Join?

Youth may be enrolled in 4-H clubs and designated as 4-H club members when they meet the following criteria:

- They are ages 8 to 18 (as of September 1 of the current 4-H year, which spans September 1 to 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.
- A parent/guardian enrolls them in 4-H using 4HOnline (<https://florida.4honline.com>). Paper enrollment forms are available to be printed out for families without Internet access (<https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/get-involved/>).
- 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, or 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 the information supplied to you about the 4-H Youth Development Program. 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**,*

which is especially informative, posted on the state 4-H website (<https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu>).

3. Begin by recruiting several interested, eligible children to join the club (five or more is usually a good minimum number). 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 babysitters! 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 begin to think about, projects to be carried by the club. Review the 4-H curriculum catalog (<https://shop4-h.org/collections/curriculum-collection>) 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 may not need all of them. Many clubs seem to operate fine with only 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 to be printed out (perhaps by other 4-H members with Internet access) for families without Internet access (<https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/get-involved/>).

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 <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu> 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 website at <https://shop4-h.org/collections/curriculum-collection>.

3. If you want more members for your club than you have been able to recruit, tell your county 4-H staff. The staff can write news releases to help recruit additional members, or you can write one yourself. Recruiting can also be done through other methods, such as the 4-H newsletter and website.

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.)

Regarding use of the 4-H name and emblem, more information can be found online at <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Just as many club members will work to achieve standards, clubs themselves may also strive to meet specific *Standards of Excellence*. There are four levels of standards available for clubs to achieve. For a description of the clover standards, view the Club Standards of Excellence Application at <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu>. 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 is the "Standards of Excellence for 4-H Clubs and Groups" application at <http://florida4h.org>.
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 published in the county 4-H newsletter or on the county 4-H website so that 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 the county 4-H website), and read them aloud at club meetings 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 and 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 e-mail.

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 website regularly to learn about current 4-H news and resources.
7. Promote pride in 4-H! Flag sets, T-shirts, promotional items, and gifts can be ordered from the national 4-H Source Book and online at <https://shop4-h.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 (https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/entity/topic/series_vts).