



Starting a 4-H Club

Opportunities for You and Your Community

- **What kind of group do we want?**
- **How do we recruit 4-H members and how many should we have?**
- **How do I enroll my group as a 4-H club?**
- **What about project materials?**
- **Do 4-H members pay dues?**
- **What about insurance?**
- **Where and when will our club meet?**
- **What are some program ideas?**

Get Together to Have Fun and Learn!

Clubs are one of the most popular aspects of the 4-H Youth Development Program. While today's 4-H offers many options for young people, clubs provide opportunities for them to get together to learn by doing, make new friends, and develop teamwork and leadership skills.

Youth ages 9 to 19 can belong to 4-H clubs or groups and choose projects and activities that match their interests. Five- to eight-year-olds who want to participate in organized clubs belong to Cloverbuds, which is designed to meet their developmental needs. Cloverbuds emphasizes cooperative learning and excludes competitive events. More and more counties in Alabama are making Cloverbuds part of their 4-H programs.

What Kind of Club Could We Have?

Clubs can be either general 4-H clubs or they can focus on interest topics, such as the environment, pets, photography, or other 4-H subject areas. They can be organized in a variety of ways:

- **Neighborhood Club**—Youth and families in the same neighborhood
- **Community Club**—Youth and families in the same or nearby communities
- **Child Care Program**—Kids in the same daycare or after-school program
- **Interest or Project Club**—Young people who want to learn about a specific interest or project
- **Cloverbuds**—Families who live close together and have children ages 5 to 8
- **Community Service Club**—Youth who want to concentrate on doing community service projects in their communities, schools, etc.
- **Church Group**—Families and youth who attend the same church
- **Home School Group**—Families who educate their children at home
- **Virtual Club**—Kids and families who form a club through online computing
- **Other**—Any group of youth who want to come together to form a club

Be Creative!

4-H groups can operate in virtually any way that meets the needs of kids as long as positive youth development is the foundation of the club.



Think of All the Possibilities!

Here are some examples of 4-H clubs based on a variety of interests:

- A day-care provider works with the local Extension staff to set up a 4-H club in an after school day-care program. The day-care provider meets every week with *Katie's Kids* to carry out fun, learning experiences around a variety of interests and projects at their club meetings. They even made a project to exhibit at the county fair.
- The *River Rangers*, young people interested in the environment, enjoy activities related to environmental issues and activities. Advised by volunteer leaders (a science teacher and a forester), they formed a club that canoes, builds bat boxes, and coordinates an environmental fair, among other projects and activities. Some members of this club also participate in other events and activities in a general 4-H club.
- The *Jackson Action Club* meets once a month during the school year and twice a month in the summer. Youth leaders each plan and conduct one meeting. Ten minutes are set aside at each meeting for business. Activities include visiting a nature center, constructing bird feeders for the elderly, and touring a bank where they learned a lesson on the time value of money—and more! All of this happens with less than two hours of business during the entire year.
- Twelve high school students formed the *High Impact Club* based on their interest in agribusiness careers. At the start of the year, they chose twelve learning projects and assigned someone to plan each one. Every month the club gets together for their program: touring a poultry facility, chatting with Chinese exchange students, or searching the World Wide Web for information on agricultural careers and training.
- In the *Flower Ridge 4-H Club*, leadership is shared among all adults and youth. A list is devised at the beginning of the year, and each leader signs up for one area of responsibility. The leader recruits parents and youth to help. Areas of responsibility include monthly meetings, new families and promotion, liaison with the Extension office and county meetings, project work, Cloverbuds, enrollment, and county activities.

What About Rules?

4-H club rules should create a flexible and adaptable framework, not stifle kids' growth or interests. Any rules should contribute to positive youth development and focus on such fundamental issues as safety and mutual respect. Kids must be in charge of making the rules. That's leadership development!

How Should 4-H Club Meetings Look?

Club gatherings can look however the kids choose for them to look—it's *their* club. They can change in format. Think about why members are involved and stay involved. What are they looking for? Help the kids plan club gatherings to meet those needs. Business meetings may be useful at times, but they shouldn't be a focal point of every meeting.



How Do We Recruit Members and Adult Leaders?

First, how many members will be in the club? Clubs can have as few as five members or as many as the leader feels can be included effectively in the group. Six to 10 members per adult leader may be best. However, it depends on the number and variety of activities in your club. It also depends on how many other leaders will be working with you. Limit your first group to a number with which you and your co-leaders feel comfortable!

Recruiting members is seldom hard to do. Contact your county Extension office or Regional Extension Agent—they usually have names of kids who want to join a club. Your Extension staff may have a recruiting program or ideas for recruiting club members.

You may find it helpful to recruit other adults to help with advising the group. Interested parents, 4-H alumni, or friends are often willing to help. This gives the leader much needed assistance and provides continuity for club meetings. An older, experienced teen member can help teach younger members and lead activities. In recruiting, be sure that programs are equally open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, marital status, disability, or veteran status. Diversity enriches our lives and builds our communities!

How Do We Obtain a Charter?

To become an official 4-H club, your group will need to complete a 4-H Charter Application. This application requires that you have met certain criteria:

- Have five or more members
- Have one or more screened & trained adult volunteer(s)
- Have an initial place of operation (for at least 3 months in advance)
- Develop club rules and identify initial areas of club interest
- Have chosen an official club or group name
- Have elected club officers if appropriate for the club

The club president and the club's adult volunteer will sign the charter. It will be submitted to the county Extension office for signature by the appropriate Extension staff. The agent will then see that a presentation is made to group members and leaders on the details of maintaining an effective 4-H club. When the charter is approved, the club will be certified as an official 4-H club.

How Do We Enroll My Group as a 4-H Club?

Enrollment is required for participation in a 4-H club. Your county Extension office or Regional Extension Agent has the necessary enrollment forms. These forms can be down-loaded from the Alabama 4-H web site (www.Alabama4H.com).

The 4-H year starts August 1 and runs through July 31. All 4-H members must reenroll every year. Each county has a due date for enrollment. It's a good idea to enroll early so you and your members stay continually on the mailing list and receive notices of all events and activities. Most counties also have a deadline for enrollment additions and changes to be eligible to participate in state and regional activities.



Do 4-H Members Pay Dues?

No, Alabama 4-H members do not have to pay dues. Some clubs may decide to pay for supplies by assessing a small fee per member or by working together on a fund-raising project. Counties may assess a per member fee, collected and turned in by the leader, to cover specified costs (e.g., insurance, newsletters). If you and your club choose to hold a fund-raising project, be sure to check with your county or regional Extension staff about fund-raising guidelines and policies. They also have ideas about fund-raising.

Where Will Our Club Meet?

The number and location of members may determine where your club meets. Clubs meet in Extension offices, schools, community halls, churches, even car dealerships and banks! It may be easiest to meet at the leader's home, which may be the only available location. Many clubs rotate meetings to give each family an opportunity to host a meeting.

How Often Will Our Club Meet?

Work with your club members to find the best time for them to get together. Possibilities for choosing a day and time for club meetings include the following:

- Once a week, after school (This works well for elementary age members.)
- Every 2 weeks, after school or on a weeknight
- Once a month, on a weeknight
- Once a month, on a Saturday or Sunday
- Other variations, determined by the needs of your club members

What About Project Materials?

Project materials, such as publications and other support materials, can be ordered and picked up at your county Extension office and through the Alabama 4-H web site (www.Alabama4H.com).

What About Insurance?

When a volunteer has completed an application, had references checked, had an interview with 4-H staff, and received a letter of acceptance from the 4-H office, he or she automatically has liability insurance coverage through the Alabama Cooperative Extension System when leading a 4-H group or activity. Accident insurance is not automatic. If you choose, your 4-H club can apply for this. A number of companies offer supplemental accident insurance plans for youth groups. American Income Life is one such company (www.americanincomelife.com/4h2.htm).

Annual premiums usually are low cost (e.g., \$1 per member or \$2 per motorcycle or horse club member). This insurance covers your 4-H members (leaders also may be covered) from the time they leave home until they return home from any 4-H activity. Insurance is also available for special activities or events on a per day basis.

The 4-H leader must complete and send the forms directly to the insurance company. Some counties may include the \$1 or \$2 per member insurance fee in a participation or project service fee. Then they submit accident coverage for all members in the county. Check with your county or regional Extension staff for their recommendations on handling accident insurance for members.