

4-H Interest Clubs

If you look at 4-H across the country, you will see that *interest clubs* are growing like kudzu. Kids today often have very specialized interests and pursuits: shooting sports, hiking and camping, health and fitness, pet care, web design – dozens of subjects that 4-H can employ to help them learn and grow. In looking to reach teens, especially, an interest club may be more appealing than a general, community club.

Tips for starting a special interest club

- 4-H is for youth, so find out what youth in your community are interested in. If they are involved in things they *really* want to do, the club will be successful. And if youth want to do things for which there are no other avenues for participation (like skateboarding, public speaking, or dog care), perhaps 4-H can give them an outlet.
- Think of possibilities not problems. In non-traditional projects, we often focus first on all the problems, the reasons why something can't work. Instead, focus on the potential for what this could mean for youth and your community. You can bring in others to help you problem-solve later.
- Involve young people in setting up the club. 4-H is about learning by doing, and kids will learn if they are involved from the very beginning in helping decide how the club will operate, be structured and continue. They “own it,” so young people become the advocates for the club and bring their parents along.
- Look for a few key adults to provide club leadership. Are there young people in the community (like college students) who already have a passion for hunting or web design? They will see themselves as role models, but they will also know they need training in working with other kids. Extension can give them that training. Are there professional chefs, quilters, or dog-handlers or EMT’s who want to share their knowledge?
- Look for partner organizations. Many communities have businesses, clubs or other institutions which can provide personnel and other resources.
- Be clear about expectations from the beginning. Whether starting an international cooking club, a chess club or a Native American crafts club, confirm the educational purpose of 4-H. Everyone should know from the beginning that the club is involved in education.