



Starting a 4-H Club

LEADER LETTER

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 8 to 19 can belong to 4-H clubs or groups and choose projects and activities that match their interests. Five- to 7-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, computers, 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 day-care 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 in the 5 to 7 age range
- **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!

Four-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.

What Ages Participate in 4-H Clubs?

Four-H membership is open to all youth from ages 5 to 19. There is even college 4-H for older kids. A group can include kids of all ages, or it can be limited to specific ages or grades.

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?

Four-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. Give kids a voice in 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 personnel—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 teen or adult leaders
- Have an initial place of operation (for at least 3 months in advance)

- Develop club rules and identify initial areas of club interest
- Have elected officers
- Have chosen an official club or group name

The club president and the club's teen or adult leader (club manager) will sign the charter. It will be submitted to the county Extension office for signature by the appropriate Extension agent. 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 has the necessary enrollment forms. We use a computer-based enrollment system, which means the forms must be filled out completely and accurately. The 4-H year starts October 1 and runs through September 30. 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.

After your club enrollment form has been submitted, check with your county Extension office to see if member recognition items are available.

Do 4-H Members Pay Dues?

No, 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 Extension staff about fund-raising guidelines and policies in your county. They also have ideas about successful fund-raising activities.

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 from one home to another giving 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 (Sometimes this works best for clubs with a wide age span.)
- Other variations, determined by the needs of your club members

Counties may recommend a specific or minimum number of club meetings per year. Check with your Extension staff for any requirements they have for meetings or member attendance. This provides continuity as well as time for project development and accomplishment of individual and club goals.

Some projects can be completed on a short-term or seasonal basis. Clubs can enroll any time during the year. Some clubs enroll at the beginning of the year but may plan to meet later for a shorter period of time (e.g., for a 3- or 6-month period).

If you have further questions or concerns, contact your county Extension staff or an experienced volunteer. They all want to help you succeed.

What About Project Materials?

Project materials, such as publications and other support materials, can be ordered and picked up at your county Extension office. We are also working to put more of our materials on the World Wide Web (<http://www.al4h.org>). Counties usually have a supply on hand at the beginning of the 4-H year. Each office has information on projects in many areas:

- Citizenship and Civic Education
- Communications and Expressive Arts
- Family and Consumer Science

- Environmental Education and Natural Resources
- Healthy Lifestyle Education
- Personal Development and Leadership
- Plant and Animal Sciences
- Science and Technology Literacy

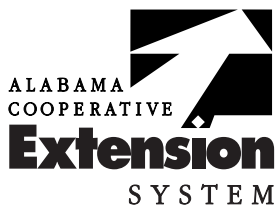
What About Insurance?

When volunteers have been accepted and duly appointed in the 4-H program, they automatically have liability insurance coverage through the Alabama Cooperative Extension System when they are leading a 4-H group or activity. Check with your county Extension office for details on how the program works. Accident insurance is not automatic. If you choose, your 4-H club can apply for this. A number of companies offer accident insurance plans for youth groups. 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 also is available for special activities or events on a per day basis.

You can obtain insurance forms at your county Extension office. 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 Extension staff for their recommendations on handling accident insurance for members.

Action Steps

- Develop your member recruitment plan with adult leaders and youth.
- Decide what leader and member materials you will need to order.
- Decide how potential club or project costs will be handled.
- Meet with members, parents, and other leaders to discuss where and how often the club will meet.
- Talk with your county Extension staff about insurance coverage.
- Attend scheduled leader training sessions.



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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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