



Letters to New Leaders: Letter 2

Getting Started with a New 4-H Club

Dear Volunteer Leader:

Welcome to 4-H! This letter has answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about starting a new 4-H club.

How Large are Clubs?

Missouri 4-H clubs can have as few as five members (from at least three households) or as many as can be effectively included.

One important factor is the number of recognized volunteers who are active in the club, as well as how they share leadership duties. Dedicated teen leaders can help support club activities as well.

Other considerations include the meeting place size. Can everyone see and hear? Is there adequate airflow? Can the seating be arranged so that everyone feels they belong?

Some people suggest that clubs have 6 to 10 members per adult leader. Limit your group to a number you and other co-leaders can handle in a quality manner.

How Do I Recruit Youth?

Spreading the word about the fun and exciting activities in the 4-H club is a great way to recruit new members.

Start with your children, other children you know, and their friends. Contact your local schools and churches. Your local 4-H staff will have recruitment ideas.



More Resources:

- LG782, [Ages and Stages of Youth Development](#)
- LG783, [Learning by Doing](#)
- LG784, [4-H Project Leader Guide](#)

TIP: To easily find 4-H documents, go to our home page, <https://4h.missouri.edu>, and search the document number (ex. LG784) and they will pop right up!

Where Do We Meet?

Depending on the size of your club, you could meet in a school, a local electric cooperative meeting room, church, daycare, or library.

Make sure that any facility used for 4-H clubs is accessible and open to all. Check with your local 4-H staff with questions about accessibility or potential 4-H club meeting places.

Can We Use Co-leaders?

Yes! In these busy times, it is highly advisable that two or more adult volunteers divide the duties of club leadership. Look to current and former parents of 4-H youth, young adults who are 4-H alumni, senior citizens, friends, and local experts to help provide fun, experiential learning activities for 4-H youth.

The volunteer process is outlined at <https://extension.missouri.edu/programs/missouri-4-h/get-involved-with-4-h/volunteer-with-4-h> for review. Potential volunteers should always talk with the local 4-H staff before starting the application steps.

When Do Clubs Meet?

Although a club should meet a minimum of six times a year, it is recommended that they meet 10 or more times a year. Many clubs meet monthly, although you might want to meet more often with youth in an after school program setting.

Consistent, scheduled 4-H meetings can help the club maintain a high level of enthusiasm among youth and their family members.

Some clubs alternate formal meetings with less formal project sessions or social activities. Some even hold “backward” meetings once or twice a year to add some fun to the typical agenda flow.

Club meetings should be BRIEF and run by the youth officers, not adults.

What's in a Name?

Your club's name can reflect the interests, projects, or geographic area of your club. All members should help to choose a name.

Because 4-H does not discriminate, be sure the club's name is not biased for or against groups. It should not cause potential members to shy away because of a misleading name. Check with your local MU Extension office to ensure you don't duplicate an existing 4-H club name.

How Do Members & Volunteers Enroll in my Club?

Official enrollment is necessary for participation in any 4-H activity and for you to have the rights and protection of a 4-H volunteer. Members can enroll anytime in the 4-H year, which runs from October 1 to September 30. All 4-H members must re-enroll in the 4-H Online system annually.

Enroll in local, state, and national events early whenever possible.

Club Materials?

Club materials are available at <https://extension.missouri.edu/programs/missouri-4-h/4-h-resources/4-h-volunteer-resources>. You can get materials from your local 4-H staff as well.

Are There Fees?

All 4-H members or a sponsor must pay nominal state fees. Some county 4-H programs have local fees as well. Some clubs pay these fees for the youth, while others rely on fundraising to cover the cost. Always check with local 4-H staff club fundraiser policies.

Are We Insured?

Individually enrolled members and volunteers have medical coverage through American Income Life for all 4-H events and meetings. Enrolled 4-H Volunteers are also protected by the University of Missouri System liability insurance.

The University of Missouri provides liability insurance that protects the organization and the individuals working on behalf of the organization for bodily injury and property damage claims, which may arise from negligent acts. It covers you in cases of negligence claims.

Volunteers must comply with state law, have a valid driver's license, and maintain acceptable personal liability insurance levels.

Special insurance coverage through American Income Life is also available for members and adults participating in supervised activities.

The most important thing a potential volunteer leader or current 4-H volunteer can do is to work very closely with the local 4-H staff.

Keeping the lines of communication open and consistent will result in a better experience for members and volunteers.

Adapted from *Letters to New 4-H Leaders*, M.A. Dodd, L. Hoglum, and M. Robinson (1998) Oregon State University Cooperative Extension, Corvallis, OR. Updated August 2017 by Elaine Anderson, Elaine George, Don Nicholson, Brittany Nieder, Tammy Gillespie, and Paula Skillicorn. Updated August 2022 by Sherry Grace and Stephanie Femrite.

Quality Matters in 4-H: A Checklist for Staff and Volunteers

- ✓ I know how to provide a safe physical and emotional youth program environment
- ✓ I know how to provide a warm welcome to all youth, free of bias or exclusionary behavior
- ✓ I know the physical safety safeguards I should put in place at all 4-H events
- ✓ I know best practice strategies for helping youth reframe conflict if needed
- ✓ I know how to support youth engagement with materials and abstract ideas
- ✓ I allow youth officers the opportunity to maintain control of at least 50 percent of club meetings
- ✓ I know how to support youth interaction through multiple planning techniques
- ✓ I know how to provide all youth with specific encouragement rather than blanket praise
- ✓ I know how to support youth decision-making in content and process choices
- ✓ I know how to create opportunities for all youth to serve in a leadership role in some capacity
- ✓ I know how to create opportunities for all youth to express ideas with others
- ✓ I know how to provide all youth with opportunities to reflect and evaluate activity and club experiences

Thank you for your commitment to improving the 4-H program quality through volunteer development!



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