



4-H VOLUNTEER TRAINING SERIES

How to Start a 4-H Club (for Youth Ages 5–18)

Welcome to the 4-H Team

4-H is the world's largest positive youth development organization. Our programs are based on the science of positive youth development to provide a rich context for youth to develop positive relationships that express care, challenge growth, and share power. These components ensure that our programs are a place where youth can belong and learn about their sparks. Youth engaged in 4-H are four times more likely to give back to their communities, two times more likely to make healthy choices, and two times more likely to participate in science-related activities (Lerner et al. 2023).

Volunteers are essential to the successful implementation of the 4-H program by sharing unique talents, skills, knowledge, and experience to provide personalized attention to youth.

As a 4-H volunteer, you represent Florida 4-H of UF/IFAS Extension and FAMU Extension, which together make up the Florida Cooperative Extension Service.

Introduction

This is one publication in the [4-H Volunteer Training Series](#). This EDIS series prepares 4-H volunteers to apply positive youth development best practices.

The purpose of this publication is to support volunteers starting a new 4-H club. This publication will cover the different types of 4-H clubs, who can join 4-H clubs, the steps to start a club, and

what to do for the first three club meetings to set up your club for success.

What is a 4-H Club?

Research shows that 4-H delivered through clubs have the most impact on youth as they provide multiple layers of positive youth development experiences. They are youth-led, volunteer-driven, and agent-supported while providing the longest participation duration, all of which enables the development of the four essential elements—belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity.

Structure of a 4-H Club

- Led by at least two volunteers or staff who have been screened and trained.
- Includes at least five youth members (ages 5–18) from at least two families. *
- Offers one or more projects.
- Organizes a minimum of six club meetings annually, encompassing educational programs, recreational activities, and business discussions. Furthermore, the club may arrange additional project meetings, workshops, and events to further its objectives.
- Meet in any location within your community including community centers, military installations, libraries, public housing sites, schools, a home, or any other suitable venue in your area. Talk to your UF/IFAS Extension county 4-H agent about meeting locations to address liability considerations.

- Selects youth officers or youth leaders to provide leadership to the club.
- Conducts at least one community service project.
- Acts as a link to 4-H opportunities at the county, district, state, and national levels.

*Some counties have separate Cloverbud groups/clubs. For more information, review another part from this series, EDIS #4H369, “4-H Cloverbuds Program: 4-H for Younger Members.”

Types of 4-H Clubs

The objectives and organization of 4-H clubs are tailored to meet the specific requirements of their members. While some clubs center around a single project topic that the entire membership engages in during regular club meetings, others offer a range of projects through separate project meetings held at separate times. Certain clubs may have a specialized focus, such as service-learning projects or those catering to specific audiences like tribal reservation clubs, after-school programs, or in-school youth. However, there are fundamental components and shared characteristics inherent in all 4-H clubs, and these commonalities collectively define what constitutes a 4-H club.

These are a few kinds of clubs:

- **Community-Based**—Two adult volunteers start a 4-H club with at least five children from two or more families. The club selects one or more projects. The club usually meets about once a month or more at the UF/IFAS Extension 4-H office, a community center, or other public location(s).
- **School-Based**—A teacher or other school faculty member conducts a club meeting at a designated time at school during school hours. The teacher might select 4-H projects that are relevant to the class and subject(s) being taught or offer a project “just for fun.”
- **After-School**—These 4-H programs address a growing need for quality after-school programming. 4-H Afterschool programs are often held in conjunction with another after-school program. They offer a wealth of research-based, ready-to-use, “learning-by-doing” curricula on a wide variety of topics. These programs include academic support and hands-on STEM activities to foster a unique combination of fun and learning that help youth develop lifelong skills, such as leadership, critical thinking, and teamwork.
- **Military 4-H Clubs**—These clubs are a collaboration of military and land-grant university partners who intentionally integrate research-based programs and resources for military-connected youth, families, and communities to thrive.
- **SPIN Clubs**—Special Interest (SPIN) Clubs are like community-based 4-H clubs but do not hold a year-round meeting calendar nor do they elect club officers. Instead, SPIN clubs cover six hours of educational activities and meet at least six times.

Who Can Join?

The county of residence serves as the primary county for 4-H enrollment. Youth and adults are expected to participate in 4-H activities and clubs within their home county. Youth members ranging from 5 to 18 years of age as of September 1 of the current year are eligible to become members of a 4-H club. However, the specific membership criteria may vary depending on the type of club. For instance, in the case of a school-based club, membership requirements may be contingent on the grade or school to which the club is extended. If you have questions regarding participation and eligibility, contact your UF/IFAS Extension county 4-H agent.

Expectations of 4-H Club Members

In general, 4-H club members are expected to meet the following standards each year:

- Complete a 4-H project, which is a series of learning experiences focused on a topic they are interested in.
- Give a club, community, or county 4-H presentation. This could include exhibiting their project during county events or the fair.
- Participate in a community service event.

These are the minimum expectations. Each club may have additional requirements. All club rules and policies should be contained in its club bylaws. See another part of this series, EDIS publication #4H338, “Adopting 4-H Club Bylaws.”

Starting a 4-H Club: Step-by-Step

1. Contact the 4-H staff at your local UF/IFAS Extension office and discuss your interest and requirements in becoming a volunteer and starting a new club. You can follow these steps:
 - a. If you are not already a Level 2 screened volunteer, complete your application and screening process with 4-H. Background screening for volunteers is important for youth protection and for compliance with Florida state law.
 - b. Once you have been approved, you are ready to move on to the next step.
2. Begin your journey with 4-H by reading EDIS publication #4H335, “The ABCs of 4-H: A Primer for New Volunteers.”
3. Work with your county UF/IFAS Extension 4-H agent to develop a plan to recruit families to your club.
4. Develop a communication plan. See guidance by the University of Minnesota Extension on [Club Communication Planning](#).
5. Your 4-H agent can help you to plan the first three club meetings.
 - a. If you’re looking to expand your club’s membership beyond your current recruitment efforts, please inform your county 4-H agent. They can collaborate with you to cre-

ate a publicity strategy aimed at attracting more members.

6. Plan an educational program, which can relate back to something the youth said they wanted to learn about. Another good choice is to use the [trail mix activity](#) to teach youth basic parliamentary procedure skills.
7. Encourage parents to attend meetings and become involved when possible. A Parent Interest Survey is available to help volunteers determine how parents are willing to assist with the club (see Florida 4-H Volunteer Resources or contact your 4-H agent). However, adult involvement in the club should never overshadow member participation!

The First Meetings

The purpose of the first meeting for a new club is to gauge interest from youth and parents and to ask them to enroll in [4-H Online](#). See the Florida 4-H [Volunteer Resources](#) webpage or contact your county UF/IFAS Extension 4-H agent for the most up-to-date handouts.

Planning for the First Meeting

- Prepare and print Welcome Sheet:
 - Include club contact information.
 - Specify meeting details, which can be finalized with member input by the second club meeting.
 - Provide member registration details and dues information.
 - Include 4-H Pledge Bookmarks, which you can request from your county 4-H agent.
 - Attach other relevant handouts, such as Club Calendar, County and State Event calendar, and Instructions, to 4-H Online enrollment. For a step-by-step enrollment guide, reach out to your county 4-H agent.
- Print [Club Bylaws](#) [handout](#).

- Print Club Roster found in the 4-H Secretary Book.
- Have copies available of Parent Interest Surveys/Forms (print or digital).
- Prepare 1-3 Get Acquainted Activities (icebreakers).
- Plan one educational and fun activity.

During the First Meeting

1. Display 4-H information and items.
2. Start Get Acquainted Activities to break the ice and build camaraderie.
3. Go over the Welcome Sheet.
4. Hand out the club bylaws for members to review and finalize in the second meeting.
5. Review officer roles and responsibilities and elect officers by the second meeting. Refer to Selecting Club Officers and Committee Members handout.
6. Conduct a club social which can be an educational and fun activity.
7. Explain enrollment steps and requirements, emphasizing the importance of enrolling in 4-H Online. (Enrolling as a 4-H member ensures that each youth is covered by the group 4-H Accident Insurance Program.)

Second Meeting

1. Start Get Acquainted Activities for team building.
2. Select a club name. Refer to EDIS publication #4H337, "Selecting a Name for Your 4-H Club."
3. Finalize club bylaws.
4. Finalize club project/projects.
5. Finalize club officers.
6. Do an educational activity, such as Parliamentary Procedure basics.

A quality 4-H club meeting consists of three main parts: (1) the business meeting, (2) an educational component, and (3) a recreational component. See EDIS publication #4H344, "Running a Smooth 4-H Business Meeting," for more information.

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. This process is done through establishing a 4-H Club in 4-H Online and working with your county 4-H agent to formalize a 4-H club name and have club bylaws voted on by the 4-H club members. More information about using the 4-H name and emblem can be found in the [Florida 4-H Policies & Best Management Practices](#).

Just as many club members will work to achieve standards, the clubs themselves may also strive to meet Standards of Excellence. There are four levels of standards available for clubs to achieve. For a description of the Clover standards, view the [Florida 4-H Standard of Excellence for Youth](#) webpage. Check with your UF/IFAS Extension 4-H agent for club standards in your county.

Ideas & Suggestions

1. It is a good idea to regularly determine how well your club is doing. A helpful tool your club can use to evaluate itself can be found in the [Florida 4-H Standards of Excellence for 4-H Clubs and Groups form](#).
2. Keep in contact with your UF/IFAS Extension 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 printed in the county 4-H newsletter or website so others will know what your club is doing.
3. Share the workload! Florida 4-H Clubs are required to have at least two Level 2 screened adults. Recruit a co-leader and direct them to contact your county 4-H Office to become approved as a volunteer.
4. Review the main points of the most recent county 4-H newsletter (or from your county 4-H web page) at club meetings by reading aloud so members will know what is going on in the total 4-H program.

5. Encourage all members to participate in a variety of 4-H activities. Encourage parents as well as members to read the 4-H newsletter.
6. 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.
7. 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 Florida 4-H website regularly to learn about current 4-H news and resources.
8. Promote pride in 4-H! 4-H flag sets, t-shirts, promotional items, and gifts can be ordered online at <https://shop4-h.org/>.

Thank You!

Your decision to serve as a volunteer 4-H club leader is sincerely appreciated!

The Florida 4-H program could not exist without your interest.

Resources

EDIS Series, 4-H Volunteer Training Series: https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/collections/series_vts

UF/IFAS Extension, "Teach Parliamentary Procedure with Trail Mix" by Heather Kent: <https://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/4hn/2021/09/01/teach-parliamentary-procedure-with-trail-mix/>

Florida 4-H Standards of Excellence for Youth: <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/youth/awards-and-recognition/standard-of-excellence/>

Florida 4-H Standards of Excellence for Clubs and Groups Form: <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/media/florida4hifasufledu/docs/awards-and-recognition-docs/Club-SOE-2023-Updated-Form.pdf>

University of Minnesota Extension Club Communication Planning Worksheet: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wbPOUQm02ILjVyCOz70ITGZxdZOAJXLcR3gXZT82LZA/edit#heading=h.vr0hc9f8hw5h>

4-H Online: <http://v2.4honline.com/>

Florida 4-H Volunteer Resources: <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/get-involved/volunteer/>

Club Bylaws Handout, EDIS Publication #4H338, "Adopting 4-H Club Bylaws": <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/4H338>

Florida 4-H Policies & Best Management Practices: <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/media/florida4hifasufledu/docs/Florida-4-H-Policies-Updated-11.01.23---Copy.pdf>

Reference

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Publication History

Diem, K. G., Jordan, J., Terry, B., Pracht, D., Butterfield, J., Cletzer, A., McConnell, L., and Knowles, B. (2014). How to start a 4-H club (for youth ages 8-18): 4H336/4H336, 7/2014. *EDIS* 2014(6). Gainesville, FL. <https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-4h336-2014>

Jordan, J., Terry, B., Pracht, D., Butterfield, J., and Cletzer, A. (2012). Starting and maintaining 4-H clubs: 4HGCL00/4H281, Rev. 3/2012". *EDIS* 2012(6). Gainesville, FL. <https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-4h281-2012>