

Meeting Planning Tips



The role of administrative or project leader of a 4-H group can be intimidating. Your roles as both the leader of the group and the facilitator of the meeting can be difficult to balance.

This section provides for planning successful meetings for your group. Keep in mind that 4-H is a youth development organization. Providing your members with opportunities to plan and conduct meetings, with support from caring adults, is your primary responsibility as a volunteer leader.

If you are an administrative leader, you can reinforce this idea with the project leaders who meet with members on a regular basis. If you're a project leader, think about how you can help your members build their leadership, communication, decision-making and team-building skills through planning and conducting group meetings during the coming year. Involving parents is also a good way to manage all of the activities of a 4-H group. Use the ideas in this section to help you be a better 4-H club leader.

Division of Responsibility and Expectations

Clear expectations of members, leaders, parents and officers can help your group function more effectively during the coming year. Consider having members, parents and officers complete the following checklist at the beginning of the year. The list suggests the kinds of measurable criteria that indicate a strong 4-H group. Writing these kinds of club goals lets you measure progress by counting what is occurring. Having written goals also makes it everyone's responsibility to work toward a better and stronger 4-H experience. Use this list to guide a discussion with your members about group expectations and to involve all your club members in decisions about how the club will operate.

Our 4-H Club Will Be Stronger If Each Member

- Attends and participates in more than half of our business meetings each year.
- Receives printed project materials for each project in which they are enrolled.
- Re-enrolls the following year.

- Completes at least two projects each year.
- Participates in at least one county or state event each year.
- Has a chance to participate in project group meetings for each project in which enrolled.
- Has input into the process of planning the annual club program.
- Can recognize life skills and choose experiences that foster development of life skills.
- Participates in at least six hours of planned learning activities each year.
- Participates in or leads planned recreation on two occasions each year.

Our 4-H Club Will Be Stronger If Each Parent or Parent Couple

- Is helped to understand the parent's role in supporting project work by members at home.
- Receives regular communications about the club program and activities.
- Is invited each year to accept a helper or leadership role in the club.

- Receives a personal invitation to attend and participates in at least one meeting each year.
- Is helped to understand the mission of 4-H and of Michigan State University Extension, and is familiar with the concepts of life skills and youth asset development.
- Has input into the process of planning the annual club program.

Our 4-H Club Will Be Stronger If Each Officer or Teen Leader

- Sets achievable goals for himself or herself each year.
- Receives guidance in planning for the project or role he or she has accepted.
- Has an experience in which he or she can grow in leadership at a county, state or national event.
- Gives leadership to one or more segments of a club program.
- Meets with a group of other youth leaders for learning and friendship.

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- Has a sense of belonging to the leadership team and is committed to the 4-H program.
- Understands the mission of 4-H and MSU Extension.
- Has received printed resources for the job he or she has accepted.
- Has another experienced leader to turn to for help if needed.
- Has clearly identified opportunities for personal growth as part of the commitment to club leadership.
- Can clearly articulate 4-H life skills and youth assets and helps members plan to achieve these.
- Has received training for the job he or she has accepted.
- Has opportunities to assume increasingly responsible positions with increasing leadership experience.
- Has a clearly identified role (job description) with a written agreement (including clearly defined goals) that is renegotiable each year.

Our 4-H Club Will Be Stronger If Our Club

- Holds at least six meetings of the full club each year.
- Conducts a program planning process in which all members and families are involved.
- Plans a community service activity or project each year.
- Has a program plan for the year with clearly stated, measurable goals for the year and for each meeting.
- Works with members to assure that 80 percent of the projects for which members enroll are completed each year.
- Encourages members to enroll in more advanced phases of projects they have already completed.
- Maintains enrollment next year at the same or higher level.
- Has at least 80 percent of all members attend one county, state or national event each year.

- Involves a range of resource persons from the community in presenting the club program.
- Cooperates with other youth groups as appropriate.
- Provides training for parents to enable them to support project work at home.
- Includes members who are from diverse ethnic, racial and economic backgrounds, and who have different disabilities and abilities.
- Invites all members and families to help evaluate meetings in which they participate and to decide the degree to which the club has met its goals for the year.
- Maintains a ratio of one identified and committed adult leader for each five members enrolled.
- Helps start a new 4-H club.



Tools for Building Strong Clubs

Activities and recreation are tools that can strengthen an already energetic program or revitalize one that is lagging. VanWinkle, Davis, Skubinna and Larwood (2002) define recreation as “games, skits, parties, songs, camping, hikes and refreshments.” They suggest that recreation – which can occur at any time – is important because it allows participants to (a) feel a sense of belonging, (b) become acquainted, (c) practice cooperation, (d) develop leadership skills and (e) release excess energy. In particular, they

suggest using the following ideas for helping to build a strong 4-H club:

- Educational kits
- Exchanges
- Games (educational games and icebreakers)
- Judging contests
- Outside speakers
- Presentations
- Record-keeping
- Role playing
- Skillathons
- Tours and field trips

The information that follows lists these activities, defines them,

provides their purpose, and offers examples and other pertinent material. It can help your group think about how to make the coming year the best one yet! A checklist of possible activities in which your group might wish to participate appears on

s A-5–A-6. Consider making copies of the checklist so all of your members can complete one.

Group-Building Ideas for 4-H Club and Group Meetings is an excellent resource for volunteers who

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are looking for specific ideas for club activities. It's available on the Michigan 4-H Web site at web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/. You can find out more about recreation, camping and games at your local library or bookstore and on the Internet.

Educational Games

- Educational games are fun activities that teach the participants a skill, concept or content.
- They are designed to help participants learn while having fun and to help participants develop trust and teamwork. Educational games provide healthy, monitored learning opportunities.

Examples:

Quiz bowls, television game shows (for example, Jeopardy, Password), drawing games, and sports such as baseball are educational. (Some sports may need to be adapted to include an educational component.)

Things to Consider:

Before starting the game:

- Make sure that the knowledge and experience level of the participants is equal to that of the game.
- Gather all of the materials necessary for the game.
- Give complete instructions and rules.
- Create an environment that is physically and emotionally safe.
- Remind the participants that education is the primary goal.
- Stage a "dry run" of the game so that the members can demonstrate their understanding of how to play.

During the game:

- Be enthusiastic about it.
- Allow other participants to help

a player who does not know the answer to a question.

- If possible, be part of the group.
- Quit playing while the participants are still having fun.

After the game:

- Encourage all of the players.
- Instead of keeping score and rewarding the winner, give prizes for all participants.
- Reinforce the participants' learning by using the information in the game throughout the meeting.

Educational Kits

- An educational kit is a group of items (such as laminated posters and supplies for running hands-on activities) collected in a container and used to teach a particular subject matter.
- They are designed to provide interactive, entertaining learning materials for specific project areas.

Examples:

Educational kits can be found in the following areas: animal science, horticulture, clothing and arts and crafts.

Things to Consider:

It may be possible to borrow, buy or build a kit related to project areas in which your 4-H'ers are interested. Many county MSU Extension offices have animal science education kits available on loan. You can also build a kit from materials you or your 4-H'ers already own. For example, homemade kits could contain magazine photos of animal breeds or plant species, posters of the parts of a particular animal species, photos or actual samples of tack, equipment and supplies related to the project area, and printed labels for everything.

After you or your 4-H'ers have put together a kit, have the group play games such as pulling the name cards out of a bag and placing them next to the appropriate picture, pulling a photo out of the bag and matching it with the appropriate label, racing to make correct identifications or – after studying a particular kind of decoration – making it.

Exchanges

- Exchanges involve individuals or groups in visiting or hosting a 4-H'er or group of 4-H'ers from a different club, county, state or country. Exchanges generally vary in length from a few days to a few weeks, with a few exchange programs lasting six months or a year.
- Exchanges are a fun way to learn about different ways of life, make new friends, learn and teach about one's own heritage, develop coping skills in unfamiliar situations, and develop leadership and communication skills.

Examples:

Exchanges can be cross-county or interstate. Michigan 4-H participates in international exchanges with countries such as Australia, Belize, Costa Rica, Germany, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Norway and Poland.

Things to Consider:

- For more information contact your county MSU Extension 4-H staff.
- For information on organizing local or interstate 4-H exchanges, see *A Guide to 4-H Youth County Exchange Programs*, which is available from your county MSU Extension office and on the Michigan 4-H Web site at web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/. For information on international

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4-H exchanges, visit web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/interex.html.

Icebreakers

- An icebreaker is a brief (5- to 15-minute), fun, energetic, interactive activity used at the beginning of a meeting or event.
- It is designed to help participants become acquainted, develop social skills and learn what they have in common. Icebreakers provide energetic fun that focuses the group on the present and on the subject or task at hand.

Examples:

Examples of icebreakers can be found in Appendix A and in *Group-Building Ideas for 4-H Club and Group Meetings* on the Michigan 4-H Web site at web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/

Things to Consider:

Before starting the icebreaker:

- Make sure that the developmental level of the participants is equal to the requirements of the icebreaker.
- Gather all of the materials necessary for the game.
- Give complete instructions and rules.
- Create an environment that is physically and emotionally safe.
- Stage a “dry run” of the icebreaker so that the members can demonstrate their understanding of how to play.

During the icebreaker:

- Be enthusiastic about it.
- If possible, be part of the group.
- Quit playing while the participants are still having fun.

Judging Contests

- Judging contests are competitions in which items or projects

are compared, evaluated and ranked in order of quality or merit, after which the judge’s decision is explained.

- They are designed to help members develop important decision-making skills (such as observing carefully, evaluating their own work, recognizing quality) and communication skills (such as expressing themselves clearly and demonstrating recognition to others). Leaders can use judging contests as a means of determining their members’ current knowledge and skill levels.

Examples:

Common examples of judging contests include livestock, horse, crops, dairy and foods judging.

Things to Consider:

When planning a judging contest for 4-H’ers who have never participated in such an event, consider the following suggestions to help develop an informal approach. Have your members:

- Examine one item and then discuss its strengths and desired improvements.
- Visualize an ideal item and discuss its strengths and compare it to the example.
- Compare and rank two or more items, then explain the decision.

Before holding a judging contest, be sure to clearly explain:

- Judging criteria.
- Important judging steps (such as observation, comparison, decision and explanation).

Outside Speakers

- An outside expert can be invited to make a presentation to your group.
- This is a great way to increase

the participants’ subject area knowledge.

Examples:

Local business people, artists and craftspeople, individuals with unique skills, or those who have traveled to other countries or unusual places are good examples of outside speakers.

Things to Consider:

When bringing in an outside speaker, it is important to prepare the speaker and the audience. Make sure your speaker knows the age of the audience, where the program will be held and how much time has been planned for his/her presentation. Find out if they need any special equipment or room arrangements for their program. Before your speaker comes to your meeting, spend time with your members preparing questions they might ask. This will keep the youth more involved in the conversation and make the program more enjoyable for the presenter and participants.

Presentations

- Presentations commonly involve a member doing a demonstration (showing how to do or make something), giving an illustrated talk (using audiovisual aids) or giving a speech (using no aids or equipment).
- They are a great way to help members to practice and develop public-speaking, research and organizational skills. Clubs can use presentations to teach subject matter or share personal information, talents and interests.

Examples:

Presentations can be done using interviews, team presentations, introductions, grab-bag games (in which the presenter pulls an item

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out of the bag and describes it), and demonstration kits (a bag containing items related to a specific topic to be described).

Things to Consider:

The Communications Toolkit: Fun Skill-Building Activities to Do With Kids (4H1560) by Michigan 4-H Youth Development is an excellent resource to support this activity. For more information on this publication, visit web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/toolkit.html.

Record-Keeping

- Record-keeping is an important activity for any 4-H club. It involves members keeping records about their projects or records about the group's activities.
- Members learn neatness, how to follow directions, and organizational skills (especially sorting out important from unimportant information). Keeping records in 4-H gives members practice for record-keeping later in life. Records can show profit or loss in projects in which financial information is important. Carefully kept written records are more reliable than human memories.

Examples:

Examples of records include live-stock record books, journals, secretary's minutes and treasurer's records.

Things to Consider:

The Member's Personal 4-H Record Book (4H1192) is available through your county MSU Extension office and on the Michigan 4-H Web site at web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/. Encourage your members to use this publication regularly.

Before introducing record-keeping:

- Be positive and enthusiastic and

- help your members see the importance of keeping records.
- Let parents know the importance of their children's 4-H project records and what they, as parents, can do to encourage their children's record-keeping efforts.
- Thoroughly explain how to keep records and use good examples to illustrate this.

As the record keeping is underway:

- Consistently devote time during your meetings for record-keeping or have special record-keeping meetings.
- Remember that each member's records are going to be different, just as their interests, personalities and learning speeds vary. If you have a member or members who have a disability that makes one type of record-keeping difficult, explore other record-keeping alternatives.
- Keep record-keeping as simple and easy as possible.
- Show interest in each member's records.
- Give members help if needed and consider inviting older 4-H'ers – who take pride in their record-keeping – to work with younger members.

Role Playing

- Role playing involves setting up a realistic scenario and having participants play the roles of characters in the scenario.
- This helps young people develop a feel for real situations they may face and learn how to plan for emergencies. It can also help volunteer leaders learn about their members' decision-making skills.

Examples:

Some possible role-playing scenarios could be:

1) A teen leader is asked to step in for a project leader who is ill and who was going to demonstrate a complex project of which the teen leader has some knowledge. 2) The process a first-time exhibitor goes through to prepare for the county fair. 3) What a member should do if he or she comes home to an empty house and finds an animal showing unfamiliar symptoms.

Things to Consider:

There are two ways to set up a scenario.

1. Write the scenarios ahead of time. Gather the necessary supplies. Give the players time to read the scenario, look at the supplies and decide how to deal with the scenario. Then give them 10 minutes to play out the scenario in their character.
2. At the meeting before the role playing is to take place, tell the members to bring scenarios for role playing and the supplies needed for the scenarios to the next meeting. At the role playing meeting, have the members exchange scenarios so that no one is role playing a scenario he or she wrote.

Before the start of the role playing:

- Make sure that the participants have the level of knowledge they will need to act out their roles.
- Gather all of the materials the members will need for their roles.
- Create an environment that is physically and emotionally safe.

After the participants have acted out the scenario:

- Encourage and thank the players.
- Ask the audience for their feedback (both the positives of the

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solution as well as anything that would strengthen it).

Skillathons

- Skillathons are a series of stations designed to help participants (either individuals or teams who rotate through the stations) understand how to do a skill.
- The purpose of a skillathon is to provide a fun, hands-on learning and teaching experience that increases knowledge and gives members the opportunity to practice a skill.

Examples:

Examples of skillathon stations include how to mount an insect or butterfly for an entomology exhibit, making pinch pots from quick-drying clay, how to feed a premature kitten, tying a quick-release knot for livestock handling, and evaluating a feed sample.

Things to Consider:

Planning and organizing skillathons takes time. Each station should take 3 to 5 minutes to complete, so don't plan too many stations for the time available.

Recruit experienced older youth and parents to help plan and conduct a skillathon. Having helpers at each station is important, especially if you have young members. After the event, recognize and praise the participants and helpers.

Tours and Field Trips

- Tours and field trips are typically a group outing that may last for a day or longer.
- They can be a fun, interactive, educational experience; a reward; a change of surroundings; just for fun; or used to develop members' leadership, research, planning and evaluation skills.

Examples:

A museum, a veterinary clinic, an artist's studio, an historic place, and a wooded area are all good places to take field trips.

Things to Consider:

As you plan the trip:

- Think about whether the trip is just for fun or is an educational experience, too. If it's educational, consider what you would like the group to learn and who the teachers will be.
- Include your members in the planning as is appropriate for their age. If you have many young members (11 and under), you may have to do most of the planning. If most of your members are aged 12 to 19, however, they can take care of such details as researching and planning transportation, food and lodging.

Reference for Meeting Planning Tips

VanWinkle, R., Davis, W., Skubinna, T., & Larwood, L. (2002). *Active teaching — active learning: Teaching techniques and tools*. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Extension Service. Available at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/4h/4-h02591.pdf>