

What Is a “4-H Club”?



Some dictionaries define a club as “an association of persons with some common objectives, jointly supported and meeting periodically.” In Michigan 4-H, clubs are the primary means to involve children with their peers while they learn.

A 4-H club is a place where young people and adults come together to do things that help them:

- Be what they want to be.
- Think and learn about what interests them most.
- Share how they feel about their activities and their lives in general.
- Do fun things that also help them learn more.
- Relate to peers and the adults in their lives in positive ways.

The primary purpose of a 4-H club is to support the development of each youth participant’s full potential. The club structure helps volunteers build significant relationships with members. Projects serve two purposes in 4-H clubs. They both attract members to a 4-H club and also serve as the method of achieving the primary purpose of 4-H – building the knowledge and skills needed for positive youth development.

The content of a 4-H club program is determined by the common needs and interests of the young people and adults involved. Members, volunteers, leaders and parents should work together to select learning projects, set the club program and establish expectations for everyone involved.

Clubs are sanctioned and permitted to use the 4-H name and emblem by their county MSUE office. Clubs should have young people in leadership roles and practice democratic principles. 4-H clubs are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status.

A 4-H club includes the following:

- At least five youth members from two or more families
- One or (preferably) more caring adult volunteers working with members, teen leaders and parents

- A structure that gives members the shared responsibility for making decisions and operating the club (This may be done with elected officers.)
- An organized, fun and educational program planned by members, volunteers and parents
- Six or (preferably) more club meetings during the year
- Participation in learning experiences outside of the local group
- Involvement in the community such as through community service
- Personal evaluation and recognition of progress on individual and group goals

Types of 4-H Clubs

Three major club structures exist in Michigan 4-H Youth Development, the community club, the project club and the explorer club. All three types include the elements of a 4-H club listed previously on this page.

Community Clubs

A community club – sometimes known as a multi-project, variety or general club – involves members of a variety of ages and interests. Its average size is 20 to 25 members, but it may have more than 100 members. All members attend the “general” club meetings, which may be held monthly throughout the year. Club meetings include group-building activities, business and educational programs. Each member also participates in one or more project groups. These meet on a variable schedule at other times throughout the year under the guidance of a volunteer project leader.

A community club is managed and advised by one or more adult volunteer organizational leaders, who are 21 or older, with the support of club officers, teen leaders, project leaders and parents. Organizational leaders and project leaders must all be registered volunteers within the county 4-H program and have completed the MSUE Volunteer Selection Process. 4-H club

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officers are elected or chosen from the membership of the entire club.

The geographic area covered by a community club may vary from a particular school or housing complex to a community, township or larger area. A community club may be sponsored by an existing organization such as a school, religious congregation, community center or block club, but many operate on their own.

Project Clubs

Project clubs are centered around one primary 4-H project, in which all members participate. The average club has 10 to 20 members. Club meetings are held weekly or monthly or on some other planned schedule and they focus on project work and business. Additional club activities are scheduled for group building, service, fund-raising, family involvement and personal enrichment.

Project clubs are led by one or more volunteer project leaders working together for project teaching and club organization. Officers are elected or chosen from among the members, and more experienced or older youth often help as teen leaders.

The project club is usually the simplest type of club to start because of its focus on a single subject. Sometimes project club members become interested in more 4-H opportunities or the club attracts members with diversified interests. If this occurs, the club may need to find additional adult support, and it may evolve into a community club to fulfill the changing needs and interests of its members.

Explorer Clubs

Explorer clubs may begin with a minimum of five members from two families under the leadership of one or two adult volunteers. The club chooses only one or two projects. It should have a minimum of six meetings planned by the members and volunteers. The time span can be as short as six weeks or as long as one year. Explorer clubs need frequent contact from the county volunteer or staff support system. These clubs are not usually intended to be ongoing clubs. Members commonly move from explorer clubs to community or project clubs as they continue their 4-H involvement. This type of club is also sometimes called a “discovery club” or “mini club.”

Other Types of 4-H Clubs

4-H after-school clubs and 4-H military clubs are examples of targeted clubs. They may start because of a geographical site (4-H after-school clubs are at school sites) or they may be focused on a particular group such as military families. Although they start because of a specific situation, both would be open to anyone in the community. 4-H clubs can also be started in a faith-based organization.

Deciding What Club Structure to Use

The type of club structure that works best in a community or county will be determined by the situation within the individual county and community. Begin by examining the existing interests of youth, parents and potential volunteers. Each structure has benefits, but the following rule of thumb may provide guidance in deciding which type of club is best to start.

Establish a community club if:

- There is a diversity of hobby or subject interests among members.
- Many projects are offered.
- You have a large number of youth and adults willing to volunteer.
- The club has at least one adult volunteer willing and able to commit time to organizational communication and coordination.

Establish a project club if:

- The interests of the youth and adults are concentrated around a specific hobby or interest.
- You have a small number of volunteers.

Establish an explorer club if:

- The interests of the youth and adults are varied.
- The youth and adults want to try or sample different 4-H projects.

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Other Types of 4-H Involvement

Other options for 4-H involvement include home-school groups, short-term activities, classes, special interest programs, individual study, family groups and after-school or school (public, private, charter) enrichment programs. Most of these alternative forms of involvement are designed to run for short, limited periods with a focus on learning a specific topic. They provide exposure to 4-H resources and the opportunity to develop ongoing involvement.

Are There Dues?

4-H youth participants pay an annual \$10 fee when they enroll each year in 4-H. \$5 of this fee goes to the state 4-H office and \$5 stays in the local county. Both the state and county portions are used to support new and/or updated 4-H youth programming. Individual clubs may also charge club membership fees to generate funds to meet club goals. For more information on the 4-H participation fee, please visit <http://web1.msue.edu/4h/MI4-Hparticipantfee.html>.



Online Resources

- Experience the Power of 4-H - Volunteer! (<http://web1.msue.edu/4h/volunteer.html>)
- 4-H (<http://www.4-H.org/>)
- 4-H Mall (<http://www.4-hmall.org/>)
- Michigan 4-H Treasurer’s Record Book (4-H 1203) (<http://web1.msue.edu/4h/downloads/4H1203Web.pdf>) – Monetary records for 4-H groups should be entered in this book, which includes descriptions of the treasurer’s duties, how to write checks and manage a checking account, and how to report and audit accounts. It includes sections on financial guidelines for Michigan 4-H clubs and Michigan sales tax facts. A blank “Application for Employer Identification Number” (IRS form SS-4) also is included. (36 pages plus cover, Michigan 4-H, complete revision 2004)