

Steps to Starting, Sustaining and Finding Outcomes for 4-H Clubs



An established process needs to be used each time a club is started within the county. Each step in the process is vital to the goal of establishing and sustaining a club that is operated by the community. The steps are not mutually exclusive; two can occur at the same time or overlap into other next steps. The process takes time. This must be taken

into account to allow for the time necessary to make starting and sustaining a 4-H club a priority. It is also important to think through all the steps and focus on results. Doing this helps to guard against making the process too complex. However, work with volunteers ready to start a club must proceed quickly so their interest is not lost.

1. Needs and Interest Assessment

The first step in the club-development process is establishing need and interest. By definition, need is something required for an individual's or group's well-being. In this instance, it is necessary to determine what individuals in the county and community perceive to be the youth-development needs to which 4-H might respond. Likewise, before starting a club, the community's interests need to be taken into account. Clubs that are planned and "owned" by the adults and youth of a community create the greatest stability and commitment to the 4-H program.

A needs assessment can be formal, informal or both. The assessment's thoroughness will vary with the extensiveness of the planned club expansion program. Informal information collection might assist with the startup of one club. However, to achieve a countywide expansion effort, a broad and more formal needs assessment must be conducted.

Note: When specific adult interest in organizing a 4-H club is evident before a needs assessment is undertaken – for example a 4-H activity has sparked interest or an adult has offered to start a club – a needs assessment may be unnecessary. In such a case, begin with the next step of building awareness and interest.

County Needs Assessment

An assessment of the resources of the county, its geography, youth and adult interest in activities, social structure and local economics should be done on a regular basis (that is, every three to five years). This assessment can be valuable when conducting a 4-H program review and plan. It is also a good tool to help

new 4-H staff gain an overview of the county situation. An extensive county needs assessment should include the following information:

- Population, age distribution, family size and family structure
- Natural resources
- Geography
- Community organization
- Community groups
- Income levels
- 4-H statistics from previous years
- Past supporters of 4-H program
- Program and participants of other youth organizations
- Facilities available for meetings
- School districts
- Types of transportation available
- Public agencies and officials.

Much of this information may already be available in the county office and much of it is useful for all county MSUE staff members. Additional information can be obtained from the county clerk, other youth organizations, the latest census data and the intermediate school district office. Developing a database to hold the information might be useful.

To determine the concentrations of existing clubs and those areas needing attention, indicate the existing clubs on a large county map. Other county data might also be included on the club map.

When conducting a comprehensive county needs assessment, it might be helpful to establish a county

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assessment team. This group will include individuals from existing committees, such as 4-H councils, boards and programming committees. It should also include individuals who represent all of the county's geographic areas and socioeconomic groups. The assessment team may include a few key volunteer 4-H club leaders who have extensive community service experience. The assessment team should analyze the county information, review the locations and projected orientation of existing clubs and identify target areas of low participation. Ask the members of the assessment team who are familiar with the identified areas to work with you later when you develop the process to create awareness and interest. The perspective of the assessment team will be broadened by including individuals not involved in 4-H

If you have a lot of experience in the county, you can depend somewhat on your personal background in completing a needs assessment. However, updated information and outside observations are periodically necessary to ensure that your perception of county needs is accurate. Above all, try to make the needs assessment process happen as quickly as possible. It is a valuable process that will not start clubs, but will save on mistakes down the road.

Note: Don't forget to ask the office secretary(ies) who get calls from people wanting information on getting their youth involved in 4-H.

Community Needs Assessment

Some type of community needs assessment is essential to affirm the need for a 4-H club in a targeted community. Keep in mind that a community can be a housing development or a block on a city street, a subdivision, a small town or a broad rural area. Find out what young people need and identify the community's recognized decision-makers.

For a major effort on club expansion, investigate the 4-H leadership potential in the community. Do 4-H alumni live there? What are the interests and skills of the school teachers or other community leaders? Review past 4-H enrollment records and talk with past and present 4-H members and leaders, other Extension staff, youth organization, school and church leaders. Enlist the assessment team members from the targeted community to do this. Share and compare information.

If you decide to establish a new 4-H club, develop a plan and timetable before undertaking the awareness and interest step.

2. Building Awareness and Interest

Before recruitment can take place, it is necessary to raise the community's awareness of, and interest in, 4-H. Visibility of the 4-H program is not only critical to starting clubs, it is also vital to their sustainability.

From the county and community contacts made during the needs assessment, select a few volunteers to help increase the community's awareness of 4-H. In small communities, one person may complete this task. For example, a volunteer or staff member may invite youth and parents from a specific school to see and hear what 4-H does, visit classrooms, or put on a 4-H club demonstration event in a public place. If you are undertaking a major county effort, it is helpful to establish an awareness team.

The awareness team is a group of individuals committed for up to a year to do information meetings or serve as speakers. Team members may be 4-H alumni, current adult and teen volunteers, 4-H members, significant community individuals, people with promotion or media experience or key people involved in completing the needs assessment.

Conduct several informal discussions in the targeted community to determine the current knowledge of 4-H and to identify their concerns for youth and their potential as volunteer leaders. Develop an awareness strategy based on county and community needs. A division of responsibility may be necessary among staff and group members. Determine who will have direct contact with private, public or charter schools, who can work effectively with other community and church organizations, and who can work one on one with families. Use techniques that work best in the community – posters, flyers, personal appearances and the local media. Refer to the *4-H Club Resources* page found on the Michigan 4-H Web site at web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/clubs/ for helpful current 4-H promotional materials.

Note: Promotional materials that specifically focus on starting a 4-H club may be more useful than general materials.

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Establish a time line for the group to use in conducting the awareness strategy. Keep in direct contact with all group volunteers and provide the necessary resources

for them to get the job done. Remind them that personal contact is the most effective means of generating interest in and commitment to the 4-H program.

3. Recruitment

Information Meeting

Work with the awareness team to conduct an information meeting in the targeted community. (See “Designing the Information/General Organizational Meeting” in Appendix A.) Current volunteers who live in the area where the meeting is being held should be encouraged to take leadership during the meeting. Potential youth members and their parents should be invited to the information meeting. The agenda should include (but is not limited to) the following items:

- Understanding what 4-H is
- Benefits of 4-H to youth, adults and community
- Determining what project areas are of interest to youth
- Expectations of volunteers and parents
- Interests and skills of parents
- Calendar of county, regional and state events
- Resources available to members and volunteers
- Sample 4-H project items and activities
- Questions and answers

Develop information sheets to get names, mailing and email addresses, phone numbers and to determine the interests and skills of youth and parents. The sheets for the youth can include a checklist of the 4-H projects currently available and space for the youth to list their hobbies so you have ideas for starting new projects. The parent information sheet should identify a variety of potential ways adults can help and ask when parents

are available and what special interests or hobbies they would like to share. Sample information sheets (“Parent Interest Finder” and “4-H Youth Interest Survey”) are included in Appendix A. While sharing this information is useful, it is not wise to force decisions on actual leadership at the first meeting.

The information meeting also needs to include a clear understanding of the volunteer roles and the importance of volunteers in 4-H clubs. Provide those adults who may be interested in being a volunteer with a sample volunteer job description. If you are planning to organize a community club, outline the responsibilities of an administrative leader and a project leader, and identify individuals to be considered for the role. If you are planning to organize a project club, provide outlines of volunteer responsibilities in this area. (See sample job descriptions in “Section V: Roles People Play.”)

The information meeting is probably the most important step in getting a 4-H club started. However, while the meeting will indicate the degree of member and parent interest, it may not resolve the question of leadership. Successful 4-H clubs require a strong core of volunteer leadership. Recruitment of volunteers is critical to the club-development process.

Refer to the *Achieving Success Through Volunteers* curriculum developed by the MSUE Volunteerism Area of Expertise team for resources related to volunteer recruitment and selection.

4. Decision Making

One of the final questions which should be raised at the information/general organizational meeting is “Should we start a new 4-H club in this neighborhood, school or community?” The answer to this question should be based on written and verbal feedback generated during the meeting. The final decision should rest with the meeting participants and with the adult volunteers who agree to take leadership roles. As a 4-H staff member or middle manager volunteer, answer questions and coordinate efforts in the desired direction.

Often the information/general organizational meeting ends with a definite interest among families and a tentative commitment of leadership. If the group does decide to start a club, have them set dates for a first club meeting. (See “Designing the Initial 4-H Club Meeting” in Appendix A.) Ask for volunteers, from the parents and teens in attendance, to assist at this meeting. You or your awareness team will need to make follow-up contacts before the planning meeting to answer questions and build volunteer commitment.

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If the group attending the information meeting is large, it is possible that more than one club may be started. If the people who volunteer to act as club leaders are inexperienced, they should begin working with 5 to 15 members because it is easier to work with smaller groups and success is more likely.

Should the group decide not to start a club, you can refer any interested families to other existing clubs. Whatever the reasons the group has for not starting a club, be sure to carefully document them for future reference. You may want to keep them on your 4-H newsletter list for a year. Keep this information with your county assessment data.

5. Volunteer Selection, Orientation and Training

All new prospective volunteers who will be working with children on an ongoing basis must be processed through the “MSUE Child Well-Being Volunteer Selection Process” before they can begin working with groups of children. Every county office has a copy of this policy. It is also available on the MSUE Web site at web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/cwbvsp.html.

Volunteer orientation and training should be conducted on a regular basis and include topics pertinent to new club leaders. (See “Designing the Volunteer 4-H Club Leader Orientation and Planning Meeting” in Appendix A.) For most new groups, monthly personal contact,

by staff, with the club leader is critical. If a new club is struggling, you may need to make more frequent contact. Club mentors – experienced leaders trained to help leaders of new 4-H clubs – can help with the responsibility of supporting new clubs. With training and materials, these individuals can be a valuable link to newly formed clubs. Regular contact by someone acting on behalf of the 4-H staff in a volunteer role can bring a great deal of reassurance to new adult volunteers. For many new clubs, this consistent contact is needed into the club’s second year.

6. Club Organization and Administration

Planning Session

Meet with the prospective volunteers and a few older young people who are members of the new club to plan and prepare all aspects of a club organizational meeting (usually the second meeting with all youths and parents). Work with the group to help them understand the elements of effective meetings, and the type and length of projects to be offered. Finalize who will lead the projects and who will serve as the administrative leader or team. Allow the volunteers and youth the freedom to determine the final agenda items.

Organizational Meeting

Volunteers for the new club should provide primary leadership at the organizational meeting. A staff member or club mentor should attend the meeting to lend support as needed. Make sure the agenda is followed, the meeting moves rapidly and that everyone is involved. The group might brainstorm and choose a name for the club. They should also determine the time, place and frequency of future club meetings. Project leaders should describe what will happen in

the project area and the date, time and place of the first meeting. Arrangements should be made so that parents are kept informed of club plans and are invited to attend meetings. Other topics for the organizational meeting include project sign-up, get-acquainted activities and preparations for elections.

When a group has confirmed its membership, leadership and basic structure, everyone who will be involved must complete enrollment forms, if they aren’t completed at the informational meeting. Some counties issue a formal charter to document that the club has the authority to use the 4-H club name and emblem. All new clubs must sign an affirmative action statement.

Subsequent Meetings

It is important that each club include youth leadership and a group decision-making process. Each club should elect officers or establish informal youth leadership roles. For Cloverbud groups, this process may be less formal than for groups with older youth. Adult leaders need to establish a “shadow” leadership style by helping the officers or teen leaders set agendas and learn the

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steps of an effective meeting. (See “Designing the 4-H Club Officer Training Meeting” in Appendix A.) At the actual club meeting, however, the leader should stay in the background while the officers or teen leaders conduct the meeting. See the section, “4-H Club Member and 4-H Club Officer Ceremonies,” in Appendix B for ideas about installing club officers.

Setting goals and program planning need input from the total club. Clubs may set up committees to complete the goals set by the club. For new clubs, committee and organizational details need to remain simple and clear. Committees are an excellent way to involve more members in the decision-making process and in organizing the club’s activities. Nurture the feeling of club ownership among members, leaders and parents. Selection of a club name is a great first step in this process.

As participants become more involved in the club activities, they adopt the 4-H organization as their own. Be sure to review the Michigan 4-H club model with the club, emphasizing the importance of regular meetings. Be prepared to support and recognize the efforts of the club and then withdraw as the primary support person. Strive to make them realize that their club is a part of the larger 4-H program throughout the county, state and nation.

Club Financial Management Expectations

4-H youth participants pay an annual \$10 fee when they enroll each year in 4-H. The fee is used to sup-

port county and state programming. Local groups may also choose to raise money for their educational and recreational goals through fund-raising, dues or both. Fund-raising should be done for the good of the total group and should be consistent with the county 4-H fund-raising policies. Fund-raising should not be the main focus of the group activities nor exclude any individual from participation. Clubs are encouraged to support the financial needs of county, state and national 4-H programs. (See the *Michigan 4-H Treasurer’s Record Book*, 4HI 203, for more information on club financial management.)

All 4-H entities (such as clubs, councils, boards and committees) must go through an authorization process in order to operate under the name of 4-H and receive tax-exempt, nonprofit status with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The authorization process consists of three parts:

1. Obtaining an Employer Identification Number (EIN)
2. Receiving a 4-H charter
3. Having National 4-H Headquarters certify to the IRS that it is a 4-H entity

For more information on the authorization process see the document, “Becoming an Authorized 4-H Group and Maintaining that Status” at http://web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/downloads/Becoming_Authorized_4-HGroup_9-08.pdf.

7. Recognition in Clubs

Recognition is a key aspect of youth and volunteer development and should be built into club programming also. It is a way of saying “thank you” – and giving a tangible item along with words – for a job well done. When an individual goes above and beyond, it only makes sense to recognize and reward him or her. Reinforcing such an accomplishment encourages improvement. It also serves to invite the person back for another opportunity. When used effectively and appropriately, recognition encourages and supports learning in all parts of our lives. It is broader than competition, but can include competitive aspects. A comprehensive recognition program in a club includes opportunities for recognition based on participation,

progress towards goals, standards of excellence, peer competition and cooperation.

Research has shown that successful recognition programs address the following principles:

Principle 1: Emphasize success rather than failure.

Principle 2: If the person being honored likes public recognition, deliver recognition and reward in that way.

Principle 3: Deliver recognition in a personal and honest manner. Avoid providing recognition that is too slick and overproduced.

Principle 4: Tailor recognition and reward to the unique needs of the people involved. Having many recognition and reward options makes it possible to

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acknowledge accomplishments in ways appropriate to the particulars of a given situation.

Principle 5: Timing is crucial. Recognize contributions throughout a project or program year. Reward contributions close to the time an achievement is realized. Time delays weaken the impact of most recognition.

Principle 6: Strive for a clear, unambiguous and well-communicated connection between accomplishments and the recognition received. Be sure people understand why they receive awards and the criteria used to determine awards.

Principle 7: Plan recognition that is in proportion to the achievement. Be consistent in recognizing all when they contribute in comparable ways although the type of recognition may differ.

Principle 8: Recognize recognition. That is, recognize people who recognize others for doing what's best for the organization and the members they work with.

You'll find more ideas for recognizing your 4-H'ers and others in the *Michigan 4-H Recognition Handbook*. The book is posted as a PDF on the Michigan 4-H Youth Development Web site at web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/ in the 4-H Club Resources section.

8. Club Ceremonies

Ceremonies are a wonderful way to build a sense of belonging and community in a 4-H club. Examples of ceremonies that can be used for induction of new

members and club officers can be found in "Appendix B: 4-H Club Ceremonies."

9. Evaluating Outcomes

Evaluating outcomes of the 4-H club experience should be a part of the annual planning for each club. Club leaders and officers should plan to build evaluation into the annual planning process for the group. Evaluation of the overall club programming efforts in the county is the responsibility of the county staff. The Michigan 4-H Guiding Principles provide a good basis for your evaluation efforts.

Evaluation can be as simple as an informal discussion with members, parents and volunteers about their general satisfaction with their 4-H club experience. Evaluation can also be a more formal, but simple, survey or focus group discussion about specific issues related to an individual club or the total county club development effort.

Use the indicators below to begin evaluating the success and effectiveness of 4-H clubs in your county. When seeking information from youth members of clubs, these items must be put in more specific and understandable language.

Desired Outcomes of 4-H Clubs

Active participation in a 4-H club helps young people develop the following assets and life skills:

- Greater knowledge and appreciation of themselves and others
- Decision-making skills
- Public and interpersonal communication skills
- Positive interactions with other young people and with adults
- Responsibility for themselves
- An ethic of service to group and community
- An attitude of lifelong inquiry and application of information
- An ability to relate to a constantly changing world
- Strengthened family interactions
- Career exploration and workforce preparation skills
- Leadership skills
- Ability to work effectively as part of a team
- Greater understanding of and appreciation for diversity
- Practical knowledge and skills in project areas

Adults involved in 4-H roles as volunteers often grow and develop in the same areas as the youth participants.

Signs of Successful 4-H Clubs

The member and volunteer behaviors listed below can be observed in a 4-H club that is successful in achieving the goals and outcomes of 4-H.

Active Participation in Learning

- By developing competency in chosen projects and life skills
- By doing and discovering through multiple learning styles
- By doing things that have tangible results
- Through progressive accomplishments and challenges
- Is fun for young people and adults

Decision-Making Opportunities

- In groups (such as establishing group goals, plans and actions and experiencing the democratic process)
- Individually (such as making choices in project work and evaluating progress)

Social Interaction

- Learning to participate appropriately in competitive and cooperative learning situations
- With peers, adults and persons outside the group
- Family-centered activities
- Fun

Leadership

- Members involved in leadership roles (Common roles include president, vice president, secretary and treasurer) (Common leadership activities include giving demonstrations and teaching projects to younger 4-H members) (For a listing of roles and responsibilities, see “Section V: Roles People Play.”)
- Adults serving as facilitators and showing how without doing for youth

- Shared leadership among adults, parents, and youth
- Participation in leadership training and practicing what is learned

Evaluation

- Assessing personal progress and club organization
- Feedback on results, products and achievements
- Using feedback to plan future activities

Recognition

- Appreciation of one’s own accomplishments
- Interpersonal acknowledgment and reinforcements
- Incentives and awards for individuals and groups

Public Affirmation

- Exhibition of products.
- Public presentation of ideas (speeches and demonstrations)

Community Involvement

- Using community resources in 4-H
- Contributing to the welfare and development of the community

Affiliation

- With Michigan State University Extension
- With county, state, national and international 4-H programs
- With the Michigan 4-H Foundation