



A Guide for New Members

2026



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EXTENSION

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What is 4-H?

4-H is the premier youth development program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Originating in the early 1900's as "four-square education," the 4-H's (head-heart-hands-health) seek to promote positive youth development, facilitate learning and engage youth in the work of their community to enhance the quality of life.

Since 4-H began more than 100 years ago, it has become the nation's largest youth development organization. The 4-H idea is simple: help young people and their families gain the skills needed to be proactive forces in their communities, while nurturing youth to their full potential.

4-H History

4-H began in Clark County, Ohio. On January 15, 1902, Mr. Albert Belmont Graham, the superintendent of the Springfield Township Schools at that time, organized a meeting with some thirty boys and girls in the county courthouse basement. The intent behind the meeting was to learn more about harvesting corn, planting a garden, testing soil samples, tying knots in rope and identifying natural wildlife such as weeds and insects. Eventually, the group came to be called the "Boy's and Girl's Agricultural Club".

While deeply rooted within Ohio, the 4-H program has since spread to all fifty U.S. States and internationally to more than eighty countries around the world. However, Ohio is proud of its early 4-H heritage and of the fact that the Ohio programs are one of the largest in existence today. 4-H is no longer only for members of the farming community, but extends into the suburbs and inner-cities all over America.

Membership is open to all youth between the ages of five and nineteen. Members are welcome, regardless of cultural, economic and social backgrounds. Therefore, even with the many changes in society today, Graham's basic aim for 4-H remains the same: "The development of youth as individuals and as responsible, productive members of the community in which they live."

Who Brings 4-H to You?

As part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Cooperative Extension System of state land-grant

4-H Mission

4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential, working and learning in partnership with caring adults.

4-H Vision

A world in which youth and adults learn, grow and work together as catalysts for positive change.

The 4-Hs

Head, Heart, Hands, and Health are the four Hs in 4-H, and they are the four values members work on through fun and engaging programs.

- Head - Managing, Thinking
- Heart - Relating, Caring
- Hands - Giving, Working
- Health - Being, Living

The 4-H Pledge

*I pledge my head to clearer thinking,
My heart to greater loyalty,
My hands to larger service,
and my health to better living,
for my club, my community, my country, and my world.*

The Emblem



universities and colleges, the 4-H Youth Development Program is built on the nation's best research, education, and practice.

There is an Ohio State University Extension office in each of Ohio's 88 counties which serves as the local headquarters for 4-H. County Extension personnel, such as the 4-H Youth Development Educator, are employees of The Ohio State University and work under the leadership of the State 4-H Leader and other professionals in the Ohio 4-H Office in Columbus.

Who can join 4-H?

- Eligibility for Cloverbud participation begins when a child is age 5 and enrolled in kindergarten as of January 1.
- Eligibility for participation in 4-H projects and competitive events begins when a child is age 8 and in third grade as of January 1. Any youth age 9 or above is eligible for project membership, regardless of grade level. Membership can continue through December 31st of the year in which the youth attains the age of 19.

4-H Cloverbuds

The overall purpose of the 4-H Cloverbud program is to foster the development of life skills that are essential for the cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of Kindergarten through 2nd graders by providing a unique educational opportunity. Children in these grades are a distinct audience for 4-H, with unique learning characteristics and developmental needs that are different from older children and youth served through 4-H membership.

4-H Cloverbud programs are activity focused and not project focused and built on cooperative learning, rather than competitive activities. Cloverbuds explore areas of healthy lifestyle, earth/environment, citizenship, plants and animals, consumerism and family science, science and technology, personal development, and community expressive arts. The Cloverbud program is developmentally-age appropriate, therefore it is:

- fun and positive
- activity-based
- success-oriented
- leader-directed
- noncompetitive
- group-centered

4-H For All Youth – How to Submit a Winning 4-H Plan

The Winning 4-H Plan (W4HP) assists families in requesting accommodation plans to meet the needs of Ohio 4-H youth with disabilities. The parent or guardian must make the formal request for reasonable accommodations so that Extension professionals and volunteers can provide resources to aid the youth's participation.

To access the Winning 4-H Plan guidelines and request form, visit go.osu.edu/Winning4HPlan. Submit your completed plan to your county 4-H professional. Requests can be made at any time, however, Winning 4-H Plans are ideally submitted with 4-H enrollment to ensure seamless access and time to review the request and work with event partners to implement approved accommodations. Accommodations are only implemented at the point of request moving forward and cannot be applied retroactively.

4-H Requirements

4-H has a wide variety of experiences and opportunities from which members may choose to participate, but the following are the basic requirements for a youth to be a member of a community 4-H club.

- Ohio 4-H membership is based on a child's age AND grade as of January 1 of the current calendar year. Eligibility for Cloverbud participation begins when a child is age 5 and enrolled in kindergarten as of January 1. Eligibility for participation in 4-H projects and competitive events begins when a child is age 8 and in third grade as of January 1. Any youth age 9 or above is eligible for project membership, regardless of grade level. Membership requires enrollment in an authorized Ohio 4-H club or group under the direction of an OSU Extension professional or an approved adult volunteer. A youth's 4-H eligibility ends December 31 the year they turn 19. Participating in Ohio 4-H is a privilege and responsibility for individuals and is subject to the Ohio 4-H Code of Conduct and applicable policies of The Ohio State University. (per Ohio 4-H July 11, 2017)
- Joining Ohio 4 H is a privilege and responsibility for individuals and is subject to the Ohio 4-H Code of Conduct and applicable policies of The Ohio State University.
- Members must enroll annually by April 1. The 4-H year is November 1 – October 31.
- **4-H members must attend a minimum of 5 club meetings per year to be considered a "4-H participant in good standing". One county-wide 4-H activity can be counted as a "club meeting" per 4-H year. Attendance policies and records will be governed by the local club constitution and by-laws.**
 - **Club members must attend at least 3 club meetings/events by 4-H Project Judging or Skillathon to be considered a "4-H participant in good standing" and eligible for local and state fair exhibitions. The 3 meetings must be club meetings, not a county-wide 4-H activity. Club attendance will be tracked by club advisors and reported to OSU Extension.**
- The Club will hold a minimum of eight to ten meetings annually that include business, social and recreation activities, and hands-on fun learning.
- Members must complete at least one 4-H project each year to be considered a 4-H participant in good standing.
- Members must attend any project related trainings required by their county, such as Livestock Quality Assurance or the Horse Safety Program.
- Members must have their project work evaluated according to their county's guidelines. Evaluation may consist of interview judging, participation in a Skillathon, or project book judging.

Each county 4-H program will have different deadlines and policies regarding project completion, so be sure to contact your 4-H advisor or county Extension office for details and dates specific to your county.

4-H Project Books

Youth will choose their project from the 4-H Family Guide. A project list is available at projectcentral.ohio4h.org Project books can be purchased from the Washington County Extension Office.

Across-county Lines Membership

Youth are expected to affiliate with the 4-H program in their county of residence or receive approval for membership outside their county of residence.

- 4-H membership in two counties simultaneously is not permitted.
- Youth must ask the county they would like to participate in if they may participate in that county instead of in their county of residence.
- An Across-county Lines Form must be completed by any youth requesting 4-H membership in a county other than their primary residence.

What does it cost to be in 4-H?

The cost to participate in 4-H will vary depending on several things. Many 4-H clubs charge a minimal amount of dues to help pay for club expenses and activities. Some clubs may also require members to pay for project books, while others may hold fundraisers to cover such expenses.

Most of the expense involved in 4-H will be related to the projects that are chosen. Some projects, such as foods, may use items you already have on hand. Other projects, such as animals, may require a larger investment. With the wide range of 4-H projects that are available, there is something to fit every family's budget.

The Role of the Family in 4-H

While 4-H is primarily considered a youth program, the support of the family is essential for a successful 4-H experience. Parents and family members are always invited and encouraged to participate in all 4-H club meetings and activities. 4-H is unique among youth activities because it allows children and parents to work side-by-side, having fun together, while developing new talents and skills.

As a 4-H parent or guardian, here are some of your main responsibilities:

- Learn what 4-H is about and what is required of 4-H members.
- Get to know your child's 4-H advisors and the county Extension office staff.
- Help your child select projects they will enjoy and are capable of doing.
- Provide transportation to 4-H meetings and events and attend meetings with your child whenever possible.
- Stay informed by reading all 4-H information sent to your family and keeping track of important dates and deadlines.
- Guide your child in completing 4-H projects, but allow him or her to do the work.
- Help your child keep records of his or her 4-H activities and accomplishments.
- Volunteer whenever possible to help with club activities and events.
- Maintain good communication with 4-H advisors. If your child misses a meeting, call to see if he or she missed any important information or announcements.

- Ask questions. If you don't understand something, your 4-H advisors or the county Extension staff would be happy to help you.

4-H Projects

Each year, 4-H members must choose at least one project to complete. 4-H projects are designed to help members explore topics of interest to them. Projects may also help members explore potential career fields. Each 4-H project provides a variety of educational experiences and helps members learn by doing. Members have opportunities to share what they learn through demonstrations at club meetings, county project judging events, and exhibition at the county fair.

Ohio has 4-H projects on many different topics such as animals, cooking, creative arts, gardening, healthy living, and natural resources, just to name a few. The complete list of 4-H projects is available in the Ohio 4-H Family Guide, which is available from your 4-H advisor or county Extension office. Ohio 4-H Project Central (www.projectcentral.ohio4h.org) is an online resource that allows you to preview project books and read reviews from other 4-H members who have taken the projects.

When choosing a project, it is important to consider the member's interests and abilities and the amount of time and resources required to complete the project. Projects in the 4-H Family Guide and on 4-H Project Central are categorized as Beginner, Intermediate, or Advanced level projects and have recommended age ranges for each of these levels. Members can take multiple projects in one year, but it is better to complete a smaller number of high quality projects than to take many projects and find that you don't have time to finish them.

Other 4-H Opportunities

In addition to 4-H projects, there are also many other opportunities available to 4-H members. These activities are great learning experiences for youth, but are not required to successfully complete the 4-H year. Contact your club advisor or county Extension office if you would like more information. Some of the optional activities youth may choose to participate in include:

- Overnight and Day Camping Programs
- Camp Counseling
- Junior Fairboard
- Ohio Forestry Camp
- State 4-H Leadership Camp
- Citizenship- Washington Focus
- Space Adventure Camp
- 4-H International Program
- Buckeye Leadership Workshop
- 4-H Ambassadors
- Judging Contests
- Specialty camps, such as Shooting Sports or Water Sports
- Participating in the Ohio State Fair

4-H Club Leadership

Developing leadership skills is a very important aspect of 4-H. Serving as a club officer is one way for members to build their leadership abilities. The club officers, with support from their 4-H advisor, will lead the business portion of the 4-H club meeting. 4-H club officers are generally selected by election. 4-H clubs will elect some or all of the following officers:

President: Works with the 4-H advisor(s) to plan the agenda for meetings. Presides at the club meeting using parliamentary procedure and works to ensure that all members get a chance to share their ideas and participate in the business meeting.

Vice President: Takes charge of the educational program of the club. Works to assure that the club has a well-rounded program including community service, education, and recreation. Greets, introduces, and thanks presenters at club meetings and presides at the club meeting using parliamentary procedure in the president's absence.

Secretary: Keeps accurate minutes of the business meeting, keeps accurate attendance records, and writes correspondence on behalf of the club using the county approved Secretary Notebook.

Treasurer: Keeps accurate financial records for the club. Pays approved club expenses with the club's checking account. Collects and writes receipts for all monies collected and deposits money in the bank in a timely manner. The treasurer provides the oral report of income and expenses at each business meeting using the county approved Treasurer Notebook.

Recreation Leader: Leads games during the 4-H club meeting. The officer should plan a recreational activity that is suited for the location of the club meeting and appropriate for the number of members.

News Reporter: Submits announcements for events planned by the club, as appropriate. Prepares a news article after each meeting, event, or activity, and submits it to the news media in a timely manner. Keeps a notebook with all the written articles and related clippings from the newspaper.

Health Officer: Plans a health-related activity for each meeting. The activity can be as simple as a roll call where each member responds by announcing their favorite fruit or vegetable, as involved as planning a health demonstration on making a healthy snack, or setting up a speaker to come to the meeting.

Safety Officer: Plans a safety-related activity for each meeting. The activity can be as simple as a roll call where each member responds by giving a safety tip, or as involved as planning a demonstration or setting up a speaker to come to your meeting.

Historian: Collects meeting agendas from each meeting, takes photos, and records in a scrapbook. Documentation should include information from meetings, parades, fair, leadership or citizenship activities, community service, and clinics or events in which the club participates.

Community Service Leader: Is responsible for all aspects of one or more community service projects the club participates in during the 4-H year. Gives leadership to the project and delegates responsibilities to other club members, advisors, parents, and community members.

Common 4-H Terms

4-H Winning Plan - An accommodation, adjustment or change that makes the site, project, and/or event accessible to a person with a disability.

Cloverbuds- 4-H members age 5 and in Kindergarten through 2nd grade or until they reach the age and grade requirements for 4-H project membership. Cloverbuds may not enroll in 4-H Projects.

Community Service- Giving back to one's community through service helps 4-H'ers carry out their pledge "to larger service". Service begins in your club, but can extend into county, regional, state, national and global efforts.

Demonstration- A public presentation that gives 4-H members an opportunity to share something they have learned with others. Members may demonstrate at club meetings, or at the county or state level.

Enrollment- Your child must enroll with a club and project(s) by your county's 4-H enrollment deadline to be eligible for full county 4-H opportunities including Fair participation.

Extension Educator- OSU Extension 4-H Youth Development professional(s) give leadership to the development, implementation and evaluation of the county 4-H program. These individuals manage, teach, facilitate, mediate, mentor, plan and deliver positive youth development programs through a variety of delivery methods with a volunteer core.

Family Guide- Resource that lists all the 4-H projects including a brief project description, age guidelines, skill level and State Fair eligibility.

Horse Safety Program- 4-H horse project members and their parent/guardian must complete this program before being eligible to participate in the 4-H Horse Program. Member and his/her parent/guardian must annually sign the Permission to Participate in Ohio 4-H Activities Form and file with the Extension Office.

Junior Leaders- Teens may serve as junior leaders within a club as officers and peer mentors and at the county level as members of Teen Councils, Jr. Fair Boards, Fashion Board, Advisory Committees, CARTEENS, Ambassadors, Camp Counselors and others.

Officers- Members lead the club through holding office and chairing and serving on committees. 4-H officers include: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Historian, News Reporter, Recreation Leader, Safety Officer, and Health Officer.

PAS- Horse project members may choose to participate in Performance Against Standards (PAS) Show(s) to qualify to participate in the State Fair Horse Show. A member may show in a maximum of four classes and must qualify in two classes to show at the State Fair.

Project- Planned work in an area of interest. Members explore a topic through hands-on activities, sequential learning experiences, goal setting and evaluation. 4-H'ers keep records and documentation of project experiences in a Project Book.

Project Central- A website where members can search for 4-H projects by skill level or topic and preview project books. Members can also rate and review projects.
www.projectcentral.ohio4h.org

Project Judging- Evaluation of a project member's knowledge through interview with an adult judge, review of project book records and exhibit of project item and/or educational display.

Project Requirements- Outlines the possession dates, deadlines, project judging/skillathon guidelines, resources, fair rules, judging dates, county and beyond county opportunities and much more. Format and delivery varies between counties.

Skillathon- Evaluation of livestock, horse and dog member's project knowledge through participating in hands-on skill stations that allow the member to apply knowledge/skill to real word situations.

State Fair Selection & Alternates- Member(s) selected to represent the county at the Ohio State Fair for a given non-livestock project or project area. Counties may select one or more members per project to participate based on State Fair guidelines.

Volunteer or Club Advisor- Dedicated, enthusiastic, caring adults that have completed a selection, screening and orientation process by OSU Extension. The current Ohio 4-H Volunteer Selection process includes a written application, reference checks, BCI background check, interview with Extension Educator and volunteer orientation.

Volunteer Standards of Behavior- Volunteering in 4-H is a privilege not a right. Approved volunteers agree to commit to the OSU Extension program, follow all policies and to adhere to a set of standards that insure the safety and well-being of program participants. Violations of the standards can result in suspension or termination.

Quality Assurance (QA)- Annual program required for members exhibiting market and lactating project animals by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. Members can meet this requirement by attending a one hour+ quality assurance program focusing on the 10 Good Production Practices. Youth, age 12 to 18, may have the option to test out of QA attendance. Extension Educators in cooperation with local Agriculture Societies determine county QA delivery and completion requirements within the State's minimum standards.

Important 4-H Contact Information

4-H Advisor(s) & Their Phone Numbers:

County Extension Office Staff:

BRUCE ZIMMER

Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development

KATHRYN HARTLINE

Extension Program Coordinator, 4-H Youth Development (part-time 75%)

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