

Starting a 4-H Club or Group

Key ideas

- How to recruit 4-H members and how many should we have?
- How can I enroll my group as a 4-H club?
- What about project materials?
- Are there dues for 4-H members?
- What about insurance?
- Where will our club meet?
- How often will our club meet?

These are some of the most frequently asked questions about starting a 4-H club. As you review this material, make note of your ideas and questions. Highlight information you find especially useful.

Recruiting 4-H members and additional adult leaders

First of all, how many members? 4-H clubs can have as few as two or three members or as many as the leader feels can be included effectively in the group. Some suggest that 6 to 10 members per adult leader is an optimum number. However, it depends on the number and variety of projects in your club. It also depends on how many other leaders will be working with you. Limit your first group to a number with which you and your co-leaders feel comfortable!

Recruiting members seldom is hard to do. Check with your local Extension office—they usually have names of people who want to join a club in your area. Your Extension staff may have a recruiting program or other ideas for recruiting new club members.

You may find it helpful to recruit other adults to help with club leadership. Interested parents, 4-H alumni, or friends often are willing to help. This gives the leader much-needed assistance and provides continuity for club meetings. An older and experienced teen member can help to teach younger members and lead activities.

When recruiting, we must be certain our programs are available to all people equally without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, disability, and disabled veteran or Vietnam-era veteran status.

How can I enroll my group as a 4-H club?

Your local Extension office has the necessary enrollment forms for you to complete and submit to the office. Enrollment is necessary for participation in 4-H.

We use a computer-based enrollment system, which means the forms must be filled out completely and accurately. Be sure to check the codes that accompany the form. The 4-H year starts on October 1 and runs through September 30. All 4-H members must reenroll every year. Each local office has a deadline for enrollments. It's a good idea to enroll early so you and your members stay continually on the mailing list and receive notices of all events and activities. Most Extension offices also have a deadline for enrollment additions and changes in order to be eligible to participate in state and county fairs and other activities.

After submitting your club enrollment form, check with your local Extension office to see whether member recognition items are available.

What about project materials?

Each local office of the OSU Extension Service has the *Oregon 4-H Clover* (4-H 0230) publication. This is a complete guide to Oregon's 4-H Youth Development programs and includes project and materials lists for its seven project areas: animal science, home economics, horticulture, natural resources, expressive arts, engineering, and 4-H Adventures. This publication lists all materials available in each area for leaders and members. If you haven't received this, please ask for one. You can use it as an order form and submit it at the same time as your enrollment forms.

This publication includes sections that identify general resources and materials about leadership and citizenship.

The project leader's guide is particularly helpful, because it contains not only information about the project, but also many helpful ideas on teaching methods and learning activities.

The OSU Extension Service has a cost-recovery program for all publications, including 4-H materials. Many leader materials are provided without charge to volunteer leaders, but all member materials have a fee. The Department of 4-H Youth Development at Oregon State University recommends a service fee to apply to the cost of materials for each project carried by the 4-H member. Some local offices elect instead to charge for each publication, while others use a combination of the two methods. Check with your local Extension staff about the cost of 4-H publications in your area.

Are there dues for 4-H members?

No, 4-H members do not have to pay dues. Some clubs may decide to pay for the cost of supplies by assessing a small fee per member or by working together on a fundraising project. Counties may assess a per-member fee, collected and turned in by the volunteer leader, to cover specified costs (e.g., insurance, newsletters).

If you and your club choose to hold a fundraising project, be sure to check with the local



Extension office about fundraising guidelines and policies. They also have ideas about activities that have been successful fundraisers in your area.

What about insurance?

When volunteers have been accepted and duly appointed in the 4-H program, they automatically have liability insurance coverage through Oregon State University (OSU) when they are leading a 4-H group and/or conducting 4-H educational programs/activities under the supervision of the OSU Extension Service. Involvement in fundraising activities is not covered under this insurance. Check with your local Extension office for details on how the program works.

Accident insurance is not automatic. If you choose, your 4-H club can apply for accident insurance. A number of companies offer accident insurance plans for youth groups. Annual premiums usually are low cost (e.g., \$1 per member or \$2 per motorcycle or horse club member). This insurance covers your 4-H members (leaders also may be covered) from the time you leave home until you return home from any 4-H activity.

Insurance also is available for special activities or events on a per-day basis. You can obtain forms for each of these plans at your local Extension office. The 4-H leader must complete and send the forms directly to the insurance company.

Some local offices may include the insurance fee in a participation or project service fee assessed to cover costs for publications and/or activities. They submit accident coverage for all members in the area. Check with your local office for their recommendation on handling accident insurance for members.

Where will our club meet?

Where your club meets probably will be determined by the number and location of members. It may be easiest for the club to meet at the leader's home (or it may be the only available location). Many clubs rotate meetings from one member's home to another; each family then has an opportunity to host a meeting. Other meeting places could be public school buildings, churches, fairgrounds, etc. Many schools, community facilities, and other groups are willing to lend their facilities for 4-H activities.

How often will our club meet?

There are several possibilities in choosing a day and time for club meetings, such as:

- Once a week, after school (this works well for elementary-age members)
- Once every 2 weeks, after school, or on a week night
- Once a month, on a week night
- Once a month, on a Saturday or Sunday (sometimes this works best for clubs when members have a wide age span)
- Other variations, limited only by the needs of your club members



The local Extension office may recommend a specific or minimum number of club meetings per year. Check with the local Extension staff for the requirements. This provides continuity for the club as well as time for project development and accomplishment of individual and club goals.

Some projects can be completed on a short-term or seasonal basis. Clubs can enroll at any time during the year. Some clubs enroll at the beginning of the year but may plan to meet later for a shorter period of time (e.g., for a 3- or 6-month time period).

If you have further questions or concerns, contact your local Extension staff or another volunteer. They all want to help you succeed.

Action steps

- With the other leaders, develop your member recruitment plan.
- Decide on the leader and member materials you will need to order.
- Decide how potential club and/or project costs will be handled.
- Meet with members, parents, and other leaders to discuss where the club will meet and how often.
- Talk with your local Extension staff about insurance coverage.
- Attend scheduled leader training(s), as appropriate.

Reference materials

Check with your local Extension office for these materials:

- 4-H enrollment form
- Insurance information material
- *Oregon 4-H Clover* (4-H 0230)
- *Welcome to the World of 4-H: Basics for New Leaders* video (PNW 003-VT) or DVD (PNW 003-DVD)
- Oregon 4-H website (<http://oregon.4-H.oregonstate.edu>)

Contacting your local Extension office

To locate an address and phone number, look in your local telephone directory. It may be listed in any number of ways in the white pages or in one of the special sections. For example, it might be listed as: 4-H; Oregon State University Extension Service; (county name) Extension Service.

This is part two of a seven-part series. This series is a cooperative project between Oregon State University, Washington State University, and the University of Idaho.

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Revised July 1998. Revised July 2005.