



4-H VOLUNTEER TRAINING SERIES

The ABCs of 4-H: A Primer for 4-H Volunteers¹



Thanks for Volunteering!

We appreciate your interest in Florida 4-H, the youth development program of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service. Typically, county Extension 4-H Youth Development agents are employees of the University of Florida. Volunteers are essential to the successful implementation of the 4-H program. As a 4-H volunteer, you represent 4-H and the University of Florida.

Welcome to the 4-H Leader Training Series

This information sheet is the introduction to the **4-H Volunteer Training Series (VTS)**.^{*} The series contains a wealth of information, from how to start a club, to planning field trips, to how to work with youth. The VTS and the other publications referenced throughout its contents are available from the state 4-H website (<http://florida4h.org>) or from your county 4-H staff. We hope this series provides the information you need to be

successful as a 4-H volunteer and, especially, to start and lead a 4-H club.

The 4-H Mission

The Florida 4-H Youth Development Program uses a learn-by-doing approach (along with caring adults) to help youth gain the knowledge and life skills they need to be productive, responsible citizens. To achieve its mission, 4-H accesses the expertise and resources of the University of Florida and a nationwide network of Cooperative Extension Service faculty and staff.

The Difference 4-H Makes

Although 4-H provides youth the opportunity to explore a variety of topics and to master the knowledge and skills they learn through a wide range of projects, its ultimate aim is to teach leadership, citizenship, and life skills. Youth develop important life skills and gain workforce readiness and developmental assets by experiencing the essential elements that promote positive youth development through 4-H:

- Independence
- Mastery of skills
- Sense of belonging
- Generosity

4-H Emblem

The emblem is a four-leaf clover with a capital H in each leaf, standing for Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. To use the 4-H name and official 4-H emblem, federal law requires written authorization by state or county Extension faculty

¹This document is 4H335, one of a series of the 4-H Youth Development Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date July 2014. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Original written by Keith G. Diem. Revised by Keith G. Diem, Sarah Hensley, and Ben Knowles. Adapted from Diem, K. G. (2005). *The ABCs of 4-H: A Primer for 4-H Volunteers*, Clemson Extension/South Carolina 4-H. 4-H Leader Training Series. Adapted with permission.

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4-H Pledge

4-H members recite this pledge at each meeting or event:

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.

4-H Motto

The 4-H motto is “To Make the Best Better.”

Becoming a 4-H Volunteer

4-H has a responsibility to provide a safe and healthy environment for youth. All 4-H volunteers are appointed by the county 4-H agent after completing an application and screening process. All volunteers, including youth volunteers, must complete a volunteer application. For youth volunteers, this application must be signed by their parent or guardian. All volunteers who work directly with youth (besides their own children) on an ongoing basis—unsupervised, as an overnight chaperone, or any other time deemed necessary by 4-H faculty and staff—must complete background screening. Volunteers must also complete the Youth Protection Training (<http://florida4h.org/policies/#pro>). When all requirements are satisfied, volunteers are appointed to their roles by the county 4-H agent. Each new volunteer must receive an orientation to Extension, to 4-H, and to their specific role. Visit <http://florida4h.org/getinvolved/> to learn more about volunteering for 4-H.

4-H Volunteer Roles

There are many ways in which you can serve as an adult volunteer, based on your time, interests, and abilities. Below are a few examples:

- Club leader
- Resource person
- Judge
- Member of the County 4-H Association
- Key leader for a project area or special event

For more information about 4-H volunteer positions, speak with your local county 4-H faculty.

4-H Values Inclusion and Diversity

4-H aims to meet the needs and interests of a wide variety of youth. 4-H is the youth development program of the Cooperative Extension Service, a nationwide partnership of federal, state, and county governments, and the private sector. UF/IFAS Extension 4-H Youth Development programs are offered to all youth ages 5–18 on an age-appropriate basis, without regard to race, creed, color, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, or political opinions or affiliations. Refer to **Valuing Differences, Celebrating Diversity**.*

How 4-H Reaches Youth

4-H offers youth fun, safe, and inclusive learning environments to meet their need for belonging. 4-H reaches youth, ages 5–18, through the following ways:

- Organized 4-H clubs
- 4-H school enrichment programs
- 4-H special interest/short-term programs
- 4-H school-age child-care/education programs
- 4-H day and residential camping
- 4-H individual study/mentoring/family-learning programs
- 4-H instructional TV/video programs

Methods Used

4-H uses a variety of methods to engage youth in learning, such as the following:

- Experiential learning (learn by doing)
- Youth-adult partnerships
- Fun curriculum materials and activities, such as public speaking, marine science contests, and horse judging
- Service learning
- Collaborations with other youth-serving agencies and organizations

Starting a 4-H Club

Being in a 4-H club provides youth with important opportunities to learn subject matter and life skills while working with a caring adult and with other youth. Once youth are 4-H club members, they become eligible for a variety of benefits, including awards, trips, and special

events. Of course, it's meant to be fun for the kids and for the leaders too! Starting a 4-H club isn't difficult, and you are encouraged to seek help from parents or other volunteers. Local Extension/4-H staff can help you get started. Refer to **How to Start a 4-H Club**.

Club Membership

Youth ages 8–18 may be 4-H club members. Clubs may be organized by projects or by community. Children ages 5–7 may participate as 4-H Cloverbuds, an introductory program designed to help young people explore group learning in a non-competitive environment. Ideally, Cloverbud clubs will meet separately from 4-H clubs in order to ensure that they receive age-appropriate instruction.

Expectations of 4-H Club Members

In general, 4-H club members are expected to meet the following standards each year:

- Complete a 4-H project.
- Give a club, community, or county 4-H presentation.
- Participate in a community service event.

These are the minimum expectations. Each club may have additional requirements. All club rules and policies should be contained in its club bylaws. See Adopting 4-H Club Bylaws.*

Just as many club members will work to achieve standards, the clubs themselves may also strive to meet Standards of Excellence. There are four levels of standards available for clubs to achieve. For a description of the clover standards, view the Standards of Excellence for 4-H Clubs and Groups application at <http://florida4h.org>. Check with your local county office for club standards in your county.

Uniforms and Dues

Uniforms are not required for membership in 4-H or for participation in 4-H activities. Fairs and shows may require exhibitors to wear special clothing or safety equipment. Refer to event rules, or check with your local 4-H Extension agent..

4-H clubs may decide to collect money from members to cover the costs of club activities. They may also vote to collect dues at the beginning of the 4-H year to cover minor costs throughout the year.

4-H Ages and the 4-H Program Year

4-H is open to all youth ages 5–18 as of September 1 of the current 4-H program year. Eligibility for enrolled 4-H members is determined by the youth's age as of September 1 of the current 4-H program year, which runs September 1 through August 31. Here are some examples for clarification:

- If a child is age 5 on September 1, he/she can join 4-H for the entire 4-H year as a Cloverbud member.
- If a child turns age 5 on September 2 or later, he/she must wait until the next 4-H year to join.
- If a member is 7 years or under as of September 1, he/she is a Cloverbud member. If a member is 8 years or older on Sep 1, he/she is a standard 4-H club member.
- If a teen will be age 18 on September 1, he/she can join for the entire 4-H year.
- If a teen is age 19 on September 1, he/she cannot be a 4-H member but is encouraged to serve as a 4-H volunteer.

Competition and Age Appropriateness

All 4-H programs and activities shall be offered on an age-appropriate basis that should consider the mental and physical readiness of youth, availability of suitable curriculum materials, adequate supervision, and the health and safety of participants.

4-H aims to offer a progression of suitable, educational activities that avoid overwhelming younger participants but also maintain their interest and continue to challenge them as they grow older and more experienced.

4-H uses a learn-by-doing approach to teach subject matter and life skills. Although competitive events are one means to do this, competition in 4-H needs to be balanced with fun and learning. Therefore, both competitive and non-competitive educational programs and events need to be offered by 4-H. Even competitive 4-H events should strive to include fun, non-competitive activities for participants and others attending.

Recognition is equally important to awards. Refer to **The Florida 4-H Recognition Program**.*

4-H Cloverbuds (youth, ages 5–7) are limited to participation in non-competitive activities. If Cloverbuds are part of a competitive event involving older youth, they should not be judged and will receive only recognition of participation (such as a green ribbon). Ideally, 4-H Cloverbuds should be offered separate, age-appropriate learning activities that may eventually lead to their participation in full-fledged competitive events when they are at least eight years old (4-H age). Refer to **4-H Cloverbuds: 4-H for Younger Members**.*

Liability of Volunteers

Due to their service as volunteers for the University of Florida, volunteers performing authorized and approved 4-H volunteer responsibilities (as appointed by 4-H staff) are eligible for workers' compensation and state liability protection under the same conditions as state employees. Regardless, prevention is worth more than any cure! See **Protecting Youth and Volunteers by Planning Ahead, Reducing Risk*** for tips to help you reduce risk and avoid liability and all the problems that go with a lawsuit.

Educational Materials

4-H uses a variety of appealing, hands-on curriculum materials to help make learning fun for youth. Many materials for 4-H projects, such as member and leader project guides and project record books, can be obtained from your county 4-H office or <http://florida4h.org> at nominal cost. Florida relies especially on national 4-H project materials from the 4-H Mall. To view the many choices or to order online, visit its website at <http://www.4-hmall.org/Category/4-hcurriculum.aspx>. Consult your local county 4-H Extension agent to discuss age-appropriate curriculum materials. 4-H members are typically responsible for purchasing their own 4-H project guides and other materials. When budgets allow, volunteers who are responsible for teaching others as part of the 4-H Youth Development Program are often provided publications used in their teaching free-of-charge.

4-H Policies

To learn about the variety of laws and policies that govern the 4-H Youth Development Program, refer to the state 4-H website at <http://florida4h.org/about/policies.shtml>.

A Brief History of 4-H

4-H clubs were preceded by corn clubs for boys and canning clubs for girls, organized in the early 1900s by public school educators who wanted to broaden the knowledge and experience of their students. Along with agriculture and home economics, 4-H became an official part of the Cooperative Extension Service at about the time Cooperative Extension was officially established by the US Congress in 1914. The term "4-H Club" first appeared in a federal document in 1918, and by the mid-1920s, 4-H was well on its way to becoming a significant national program for youth. 4-H is an American idea that has spread around the world. Throughout its long history, 4-H has constantly adapted to the ever-changing needs and interests of youth.

How 4-H Is Funded and Administered

The Florida Cooperative Extension Service, of which 4-H is a part, receives funds from a cooperative partnership of three levels of government—federal (via the National Institute of Food & Agriculture of the US Department of Agriculture), state (via UF/IFAS Extension), and county. 4-H also receives support from private sources, including the Florida 4-H Foundation. The University of Florida works cooperatively with Florida A&M University, the state's 1890 land-grant institution, to offer Extension/4-H Youth Development programs.

Welcome to the 4-H Team

The 4-H Youth Development Program aims to be youth-centered, professional-led, and volunteer-delivered. To make this happen, 4-H encourages the teamwork of county- and campus-based faculty, staff, and volunteers to offer youth and adults high-quality personal growth opportunities. Volunteers, as full partners in 4-H, contribute their unique talents, skills, and knowledge of their communities to assist county 4-H faculty in offering a comprehensive local 4-H youth development program.

For More Information

For more information about 4-H, go to the state 4-H website (<http://florida4h.org>), refer to other information sheets in the 4-H Volunteer Training Series, or contact your local UF/IFAS Extension 4-H office.

***Refer to the 4-H Volunteer Training Series** documents located at the Florida 4-H website (<http://florida4h.org/volunteers>).