

Getting Started With a New 4-H Club

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Dear Leader:

This letter has answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about starting a new 4-H club. If you are a new leader in an ongoing club, you will find this information useful, too.

How big should our club be?

4-H clubs can have as few as five members or as many as the leaders feel can be effectively included in the group. This decision depends on the number of volunteers involved in the club and how they share the leadership. Some suggest that six to 10 members per adult leader is an optimum number. Dedicated teen leaders may also increase the number of members a club can support. The size of the club will also depend upon what the club will be doing and where the meetings will be held. Limit your first group to a number with which you and the other leaders feel comfortable.

How do I recruit 4-H members?

It is seldom hard to recruit members. If there are exciting things happening in the club, the word will get out. Start with your



In this letter you'll find:

- *How big should our club be?*
- *How to recruit 4-H members.*
- *Where will our club meet?*
- *How often will our club meet?*
- *Is our club name important?*
- *How do I enroll my group as an official 4-H club?*
- *What about project materials?*
- *Are there dues for 4-H membership?*
- *What about insurance?*

own children and other children you know and their friends. You can contact your local schools or

churches for potential members. Your local University of Missouri Extension center may have the names of children who want to join a club in your area. The county staff also may have a recruitment program or other ideas for recruiting new club members.

How to recruit other 4-H leaders?

It is helpful to recruit some other adults to help with club leadership. Parents of 4-H members should be willing to help. Other possibilities include senior citizens, 4-H alumni, friends, and local experts or people with a special area of interest they can teach. If you feel you need assistance in recruiting other volunteers, youth specialists may be available to train you upon request.

This process starts with completion of LG636, *Missouri Volunteer Application Form*, and includes background checks for criminal records and child abuse and neglect, as well as completion of a 2½-hour volunteer orientation. Check with your local MU Extension center for more detailed information.

Where will our club meet?

Where your club meets will probably be determined by the size of your club. It may be easiest for the club to meet at various members' homes. 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 accessible public school buildings, churches, fairgrounds, community rooms, etc. Many community groups and other organizations are willing to allow their facilities to be used for 4-H activities. Facilities used for 4-H activities should be barrier-free.

How often will our club meet?

The decision on how often your club meets should be determined by the needs and composition of the club and its members. Although a club should meet a minimum of six times a year, it is recommended that they meet ten or more times a year. Many clubs meet monthly, but you might want to consider meeting more frequently than that, especially if you have a club of young members. Frequent meetings can benefit the club by helping to maintain a high level of enthusiasm and keeping the members more involved. Some clubs alternate formal meetings with less formal project sessions or social activities.

Is our club name important?

Each 4-H club is a unique group of individuals who work together toward common goals. A club name can reflect the interests of the club members, often relating to the project area

the club participates in or the geographic area where members live. Allow all the members to participate in selecting a name for the club. 4-H does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or handicap. Therefore, please be sure that the club name you select is not biased for or against certain groups in any of these categories. Consider whether potential club members might shy away just because of a misleading name. "The Sewing Susan's" would discriminate against or discourage boys from participating, whereas "The Nimble Thimbles 4-H Club" might be a better idea.

Creative or cute names for 4-H clubs are fine — but plan for the name to identify the group at the county level and beyond. Trendy names may not stand the test of time.

When in doubt, you may contact your local MU Extension center to determine the appropriateness of a name. You will also want to check to ensure that your club name does not duplicate the name of an existing club.

How do I enroll my group as an official 4-H club?

Your county extension office has the necessary enrollment forms. Official enrollment is necessary for participation in any 4-H activity and for you to have the rights and protection of a 4-H volunteer.

The 4-H year begins each fall on September 1 and runs through August 31. All continuing 4-H members must re-enroll every year. Members may join 4-H at any time during the year, but clubs may have deadlines for

enrollments which apply to participation in specific activities. It is beneficial to both the club and its members to enroll early in the year to gain the most from the 4-H experience.

What about project materials?

Your local MU Extension center will have copies of the Missouri *4-H Clover* for each family, and may have a local 4-H project listing. If you have not received your copy of the *Clover*, please ask for one.

Club organizational materials are available in print and/or electronic form. Order publications using the order form on page 47 of the *4-H Clover*, or order online at extension.missouri.edu/explore/shop.

Materials available electronically are on the CD-ROM in the 4-H leader's kit, or are downloadable on the Missouri 4-H Web site at 4h.missouri.edu/resources.

Are there dues for 4-H members?

4-H members do pay nominal state dues. There are no national organization dues. Many counties also charge a small fee. Some clubs may decide to pay for the cost of supplies and activities by assessing a small fee per member, while others may fund their needs by working together on a fund-raising project.

If your club chooses to hold a fund-raising project, be sure to check with your MU Extension unit staff about fund-raising guidelines and policies in your area. Also, they may have information as to the kinds of activi-

How can I use the information in this letter?

1. New ideas to use in our club: _____

2. Other people who could help us and how they might help: _____

3. Questions to ask University of Missouri Extension staff and other leaders: _____

ties that have been successful fund-raisers in the past.

What about insurance?

Liability coverage is provided by the University of Missouri for officially-enrolled adult volunteers who are conducting authorized 4-H/MU Extension activities. This insurance has been purchased on an excess basis; that is, coverage applies after all other available insurance

has been exhausted. This is liability insurance; it provides coverage for you in cases of negligence claims against you.

Automobile liability insurance is also provided by the University of Missouri on an excess basis for all adult volunteers while participating in scheduled and supervised 4-H/MU Extension activities. All volunteers are expected to comply with state law, have valid driver's licenses and maintain personal liability

insurance at levels that meet or exceed the Missouri Financial Responsibility limits for owners/operators. This insurance is also liability coverage and does not provide coverage for damage to the adult volunteer's vehicle.

This coverage does not substitute for health and accident insurance. Special Activities Insurance Coverage for accident and illness can be purchased for 4-H youth, their volunteer leaders and adults participating in

supervised activities. This insurance covers illness and accidental injury while participating in 4-H activities on an annual or individual event basis. Your local MU Extension staff can provide information and applications.

If you have other questions or concerns, we'd love to help you!

Adapted from Dodd, M.A., Hoglum, L., and Robinson, M. (1998). Letters to New 4-H Leaders. Oregon State University Cooperative Extension Service, Corvallis, Ore.

Missouri 4-H recognizes the importance of good character in everything that is done. 4-H staff and volunteers as well as 4-H members and their families know that a person of character:

- is a good person, someone to look up to and admire;
- knows the difference between right and wrong and always tries to do what is right;
- sets a good example;
- makes the world a better place to live; and
- lives according to the Six Pillars of CharacterSM — Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship.

CHARACTER COUNTS!SM and the Six Pillars of CharacterSM are service marks of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics. www.charactercounts.org

Other helpful resources:

Volunteers...the foundation of youth development

4-H Project Leader Audio Tape

LG 782, *Ages and Stages of 4-H Youth Development*

LG 783, *Learning by Doing*

LG 784, *4-H Project Leader*