

4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

4-H Club Program Planning

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The success or failure of any organization depends largely upon the program. Therefore, the more care and thought that is put into the program, the greater the probability for a successful 4-H club. If the program is to serve the purpose of 4-H – “providing opportunities for the personal development of boys and girls” – then every member must be considered and included in some way. The experience 4-H members get working together in the club program and personal growth through individual project work are both important.

Why Plan?

A plan is like a road map – it directs actions toward a goal or destination. A well-designed map will help reach goals and make the journey more enjoyable. A well-planned program will:

- Provide a significant role for each member.
- Meet needs of all participants.
- Share responsibilities among members.
- Ensure a balanced program.
- Provide for better communication.
- Provide cooperation and compromise experiences.
- Provide opportunity to learn planning skills.
- Avoid calendar conflicts.



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When to Plan

The new 4-H year begins in October. Therefore, it is suggested that clubs reorganize (elect officers, fill out new application cards, etc.) in August or September so new officers can be installed and ready to begin their duties in October.

Similarly, clubs should do program planning on a yearly basis. Club members may begin “thinking” about a program of work in August and try to have a definite plan by October.

Many counties publish a calendar of events or a yearbook each year. This lists all of the county, district, state and national events and the dates and should help in planning for and around these activities.

How Do We Plan?

Ways to plan a 4-H club program vary. In some clubs, the entire membership may suggest ideas at a general meeting. In some clubs, the newly elected officers and club leaders plan the year’s program. A special program planning committee made up of members and adults may use the ideas to develop a program. This program should be presented to the club for approval.

Survey Members

Each member has different ideas about the group activities and needs a chance to express them. Some kind of

survey will give each member an opportunity to contribute and will provide the planning committee with a wide range of suggestions and ideas from which to choose. Listed below are a few ways to survey members. (These ideas also could be used at other times during the year.)

Suggestion Box – Decorate an appropriate box and explain its purpose at a general meeting early in the planning process. Members should be asked to put suggestions for the coming year in the box.

Sharing Ideas – Tape a large piece of paper to the wall (shelf paper, brown paper, anything large). As group members arrive, ask them to write on the paper at least one thing they would like to do in the 4-H club next year. Using magic markers or crayons in many colors might add to the fun.

Collages – Attach pictures and other items suggesting activities to large sheets of paper, boxes, cartons or bags. Be creative! Making collages gets members involved while giving the planning committee suggestions. Have members explain what their collages mean. Necessary materials would include magazines, newspapers, construction paper, crayons, glue, scissors, etc.

Roll Call – Ask members to answer roll call with a suggestion for an activity, club goal, etc. No response should be repeated.

Brainstorming – Divide the club into groups of five or six in which members make suggestions for club activities, events or goals. All ideas should be encouraged; do not evaluate or criticize at the time. Groups should be creative! Sitting on the floor and listing ideas on large sheets of paper may be fun.

Design Your Own Clover – Ask each club member to complete a “Design Your Own Clover” form. The forms are collected and used by the program planning committee.

Selecting a Program Planning Committee

The program planning committee should represent the interests of all people in the club. Older members may be efficient planners, but they may overlook the interests and needs of younger members. Those who are not involved in the planning process may become inactive. The committee might include representation from:

- Members of different ages
- Males and females
- Parents
- Officers
- Club leaders (adult and teen)

Often 4-H club program planning committees are composed of the vice president, secretary, recreation leader and one or more adult leaders. Two or three 4-H members who are not officers may also be involved. The vice president serves as chairman. This committee makeup may also be appropriate for your club. Refer to the fact sheet “Working With Committees.”

Responsibilities of the Planning Committee

No one way to plan the program is the “right” way. You may create a successful method which is different from the following suggestions:

Method 1 – The program committee plans the entire program for the year. This is suitable for a small club and might require one to three meetings.

Method 2 – The program planning committee assumes major responsibility for planning and carrying out the program but depends on the input and services of other committees such as activity and recreation. Responsibilities of standing committees must be clearly stated. They might plan and be responsible for a certain month’s program or a part of each program. Each committee would turn its plans over to the program committee which would then coordinate the entire program. The duty of the program committee is to make each monthly program fit together smoothly.

Method 3 – The program committee can function with the help of the entire club. The members are divided into groups with responsibility for planning a specific part of the program such as time and place, business agenda, demonstration and talks, recreation and club activities.

The program committee is then responsible for coordinating the plans of these groups. This method shares responsibility but can cause difficulty in creating a unified program.

Review Previous Year

Before deciding on specific activities and events, review what the club did last year. The committee may want to conduct an evaluation with the entire

club. This is the time to consider what good ideas from the current year could be carried over and what parts of the program need improvement.

Make sure the program will meet the current needs of the members. Remember, each member is one year older and has different interests than last year. Take time to review the situation annually!

- How many members are there?
- How many boys? How many girls?
- What is the range of ages?
- How many leaders are available?
- What county-wide 4-H activities or events are planned?
- In which county activities or events do we want to participate?

Identifying Goals

Goals are statements of what you want to accomplish within a certain time period. Club members will set individual goals in their particular project. They should also have a chance to contribute ideas about what the club as a whole should accomplish.

Club goals should:

- Be realistic and measurable.
- Meet needs and interests of club members.
- Promote cooperation.
- Provide individual achievement opportunities for each member.
- Promote improvement over last year.
- Provide community service and participation.

Each club may wish to identify a goal for health and recreation. In addition, the club may choose other goals relating to activities such as safety, community service or international understanding. The group also could select general club goals that might include:

- Extending 4-H membership to others in the community.
- Expanding family participation.
- Participating in community functions.
- Creating significant roles for every member.
- Helping senior citizens or persons with handicaps.

Be sure the goals are clearly stated so the group can evaluate its programs. On a worksheet list each goal and record what activities or events are planned to achieve the goal. Devise a simple program outline to show the activities and events for each meeting along with the necessary tasks. (This volunteer series includes worksheets for planning the year's program and club meetings.)

What to Plan

It is suggested that clubs consider and plan for the following items during the year:

- **Tours and Trips** – Plan two or three trips each year – tour a factory, take a nature hike, etc.
- **Recreation** – Recreation should be a big part of your program. Plan for three, four or more special recreational events each year, such as skating party, movie, sports day, club party, etc. Several of these could be planned along with a tour or trip. In addition to the special recreation, a club could have some recreation during its monthly business meetings.
- **Community Project** – Plan for at least one community project that all members can work on together: help with a Heart Fund Drive, work with the elderly in a nursing home, pick up trash on the roadside, etc.
- **Fund Raising** – One fund-raising activity may be all a club needs, or it may take more. Plan for this and efforts will be more successful.
- **Guest Speakers** – How about having a guest speaker at two or three of the regular monthly meetings: a doctor, veterinarian, public official, etc.
- **Club Achievement Program** – All clubs are encouraged to have an achievement program of some type each year. This is a good way to recognize 4-H'ers for their work and encourage them to greater efforts.
- **Workshops** – Plan for several special workshops during a year; for example, a record book workshop, a workshop in preparation for the county fashion revue, 4-H O-Rama, etc.
- **County, District, State and National Activities** – Each year there are 30 to 40 activities available for member and leader participation. Show all of these activities in the program even though a club's members and leaders won't be involved in all of them. Do get involved in several of these activities and plan for them.
- **Monthly Business Meeting** – There are pages in the club secretary's book and in this volunteer series to plan for these meetings. A lot of thought

should be given to planning the meetings – who will lead the pledges, give reports, demonstrate, etc. Each member should be involved as many times as possible during the year. By planning for special activities first, you can plan to discuss them during the business part of the monthly business meeting. The monthly club meeting should consist of three parts: business (15-20 minutes), education (30-45 minutes) and recreation (15-30 minutes).

Approving a Plan

The planning committee has the responsibility to explain the program plans to the total club membership. Since each person will be expected to help carry out the plan, each should have the chance to ask questions and voice an opinion about the plan. One or two committee members should explain the plan to club members. Organizing the report by months may help members get a clear picture of how the program fits together.

After explaining the plans, encourage members, leaders and parents to ask questions. This is the time to make any appropriate changes. Clear up date conflicts and other concerns as soon as possible. After the members have discussed the plan and made any changes, they approve or adopt it as the annual 4-H club calendar.

Can you answer “yes” to each of the following questions?

- Does the program involve all members?
- Is the program interesting to all ages?
- Is the plan realistic?
- Are some fun and work activities included?
- Did we consider county 4-H events?

Sharing Responsibility

Good planning is the beginning of a successful year but will not guarantee it. Each person should be given an opportunity to accept appropriate responsibilities at the beginning of the year. Make sure someone is responsible for each task, whether it is a

leader, a member, a committee or a parent. Making a commitment early in the year allows people to plan ahead.

Follow Through

To ensure a successful experience, check to see that plans are carried out and that details of the plan are communicated to others.

The committee should meet once a month, even if it is only for a few minutes before the club meeting, to make sure that everything is ready for the next meeting. At each club meeting, the secretary or vice president (as chairman of the committee) should read the program for the next meeting. By so doing, each member would be reminded a month in advance that he or she has a certain part on the program. Also, the planning committee can help by:

- Providing each family with a copy of the 4-H Club Annual Calendar.
- Announcing dates in newspapers and by radio.
- Providing support to persons who have accepted tasks.

How Are We Doing?

After several meetings, look at the goals again. Ask the following questions:

- What have we done so far to reach our goals?
- What do we still have to do?
- Do the goals match the group’s interests and concerns?
- What changes should be made in the goals?

At the end of the year, look at the total program. Record your feelings for next year’s planning committee.

- Were the club goals met?
- Was attendance at meetings and events good?
- Were all interested members involved in events?
- Did parents participate in activities and events?

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