

Characteristics of Highly Effective/Vibrant 4-H Clubs*



Highly effective 4-H clubs listen and communicate effectively.

Members feel listened to, respected, and their input is genuinely valued. Vibrant clubs view communication and leadership as two-way processes in which adults and youth share responsibilities.

Highly effective 4-H clubs foster a sense of ownership in the club.

Young people want to feel the club is theirs and want adults to reduce their part in decision-making. Winning awards, competitions, contests, numbers of ribbons or trophies and "being the best" are the greatest concerns in less effective clubs.

Highly effective 4-H clubs change how they do things not what they do.

Effective clubs experiment with seating arrangements, new activities, and experiment within a certain accepted structure and organizational culture. Traditions, rituals, and ceremonies are used to connect to the past and with an organization larger than them.

Highly effective 4-H clubs work hard and play hard.

Vibrant clubs do not meet just to meet or just to conduct business, they also provide a way for members to do things together in fun ways. They also work hard by doing community service activities and fund-raisers that span a wide variety of interests.

Highly effective 4-H clubs achieve a balance between chaos and rigidity.

Effective clubs are able to achieve a certain harmony between too much chaos and too much rigidity-- ordered chaos. When circumstances change, vibrant clubs are able to adapt by making the necessary changes in rules, power structures or relations to move on.

Highly effective 4-H clubs empower young people.

Vibrant clubs enable youth to do what they are qualified to do by empowering members to develop personal responsibility.

Highly effective 4-H clubs affirm and support one another.

Healthy clubs celebrate the successes of all members and do not define themselves by any single accomplishment of the group or its members. Instead, they take pride in and celebrate the collective efforts of all members.

Highly effective 4-H clubs use a mentoring system to socialize new members.

Helping new members feel welcomed into the club is a hallmark of vibrant clubs. Buddy systems are common where older, more experienced members adopt younger members to help them learn the language and traditions of the program and serve as practical role models.

Highly effective 4-H clubs value and practice service to others.

Community service is not viewed as just another requirement for a charter or as program expectation, but rather community service is valued as important in itself. Vibrant clubs perceive community service as a part of the group's fundamental experiences.

Highly effective 4-H clubs take time for training.

Effective clubs set aside time to train youth for the roles they will assume in adulthood. Adults' see one of their primary responsibilities is to train and develop young people to become involved as equal partners in the process of planning, implementation, and evaluation. This is a key characteristic, well-functioning clubs do not just happen. Rather, they result from consistent efforts to create, maintain, and (occasionally) restore conditions that foster effective learning.

The whole is greater than the sum of these elements.

* Astroth, K. (1996). Welcome to the Club: Education Where the Bell Never Rings. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Bozeman, MT: Montana State University.