

# Tips for Conducting Club Meetings



## Structure Meetings Appropriately

The way club meetings are structured depends largely on the size of the group and the age of the members. Remember to keep the meeting interesting and to change the pace of the meeting every 15 minutes or so. The average attention span for youth ranges from 10 to 20 minutes. In general, 4-H meetings are divided into four parts:

1. **Pre-Meeting:** bridges the gap between the time members begin to arrive and the time the actual meeting begins. Activities for the pre-meeting time can include mixers, word games, puzzles, etc.
2. **Business Meeting:** members learn how to conduct a meeting and practice democratic decision-making.
3. **Educational Program:** usually project work, but may involve special presentations or activities conducted by resource people, parents or older members.
4. **Recreation/Refreshment/Social Activities:** provides members an opportunity to develop and practice social skills.

The order of these segments and the amount of time devoted to each may be varied to suit the specific activities

planned, the time and place the meeting is held, etc. Here are some specific suggestions:

1. Clubs that meet right after school may want to have refreshments available as the members arrive. Quiet recreational activities such as two-person pencil and paper games can be used to keep order and foster interaction until the start of the meeting.
2. When members can't settle down and focus on the task at hand, a short, active game followed by a quiet one can release energy and get the group ready for more "serious business." For further tips on how to handle behavior situations, please see "Manage Group Activities for Safety, Efficiency, and Effective Learning". (page 29)
3. While Cloverbud groups do not conduct business meetings, starting each meeting with the same opening ritual establishes a structured routine that is important for this age group. Use of a closing ritual is also recommended. Members can be assigned "officers of the day" to help conduct these rituals.

4. The timing of meeting segments must relate to both the attention span of the age group and the nature of the activities planned.
5. Sharing club leadership with your members is important. It makes your job easier and it develops life skills for the members.
6. Beyond the four segments there are many little things you can do to make your 4-H club meeting fun and educational. Contact your local 4-H staff for ideas.

### **Roles of Officers**

Clubs may elect youth to fill leadership positions to help run club meetings. While club offices should reflect the needs of the club, following are some of the most common.

**President:** Presides at all meetings. Appoints committees as needed.

**Vice President:** Serves in the absence of the President. May serve as program chair for meetings.

**Secretary:** Keeps complete and accurate minutes of all meetings. Handles correspondence. Keeps the 4-H Secretary's Book up-to-date.

**Treasurer:** Takes care of all group funds. Collects dues when required by the club. Keeps the 4-H Treasurer's Book up-to-date.

**Reporter:** Writes interesting reports of meetings and special club events for the local newspaper.

**Historian:** Collects newspaper clippings, programs and pictures of the club's activities and events and puts them into a club scrapbook.

Other roles youth may play in the club include: flag leader, caller, greeter, game leader, song leader, paper passer, parliamentarian, and photographer.

For additional help on Parliamentary Procedure refer to Toolkit 7.

### **Engaging Youth in Conversations to Make Decisions**

Effective youth groups make a conscious effort to involve all members in discussions. Following are some techniques to get youth talking.

1. President asks specific questions, such as:
  - Roger, what do you think of...
  - Anne, from your experience at the county fair, would you share your feelings...
  - Does anyone know of situations where this has worked?
  - What has been your thinking on this point?
2. Use special group decision-making processes:
  - **BUZZ GROUP**—When member ideas are needed to solve a problem, divide into small groups and have each group report their best ideas back in a short time.
  - **BRAINSTORMING**—Generate and list as many different ideas as possible in five minutes. Respect and value all ideas. In the first round of voting, everyone votes for as many ideas as they choose. In the next round, everyone votes only for his/her top two choices. Use markers, stickers, or colored dots for voting. Ideas receiving the most votes become the group's decision.
  - **NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS**—Sit in a circle. Ideas are shared in a "round robin" order until all ideas

are recorded. If a person does not have an idea, he/she may pass. If an idea has been listed already, it can't be repeated. Go around the circle until there are no more ideas. Do not discuss the list. Everyone privately ranks his/her choices (1=first choice, 2=second; and so on) on a 3"x5" card. The choices are tallied and shared.

*Acknowledgements: Starting a New 4-H Club, Janet Beyer, University of Minnesota Extension; My Leadership Journal, National 4-H Cooperative Curriculum Systems, Inc.*

## **Committees**

Referring a task to a committee is one of the best techniques for avoiding long business meetings. Frequently, when an idea is brought to the club, it's not possible to discuss it thoroughly and vote without taking a great deal of valuable meeting time. When possible, the President should refer the matter to the appropriate committee.

The advantages are many for groups using committees. Not everyone wants to hold an office, but everyone can serve on a committee. Youth chairpersons can learn valuable leadership skills. More ideas emerge from group interaction. Those involved in making a decision are committed to the ideas.

Each club will need to determine the committees to carry out their club's goals. Some committees may be set up at the beginning of the club year, while others will be created as new ideas come forward. Create committees to carry out big club tasks like managing community service project or club fundraiser, developing the club's recognition program, designing the club's fair banner, or planning a club tour.

The purpose of the committee should be the primary consideration in determining how large the group should be. Keep in mind that the major reason for appointing a committee in the first place, is the advantage of greater efficiency and flexibility of a small group over a large one. It's recommended that committees have a variety of members, both ages and ideas. Adult volunteers may serve an advisory role on a committee.

Each committee should have a written purpose, specific duties and responsibilities, and date for completing work. Discussion items and recommendations should be reported back to the entire group by a pre-determined date. Refer to *4-H Club Committee Planning Sheet* (Toolkit 8)

*Acknowledgements: Working with Committees, Judy M. Groff, Extension 4-H Specialist, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service; Advisor's Handbook, Ohio 4-H; 4-H Volunteer Training Unit 2, Maryland 4-H; Working with Committees, University of Illinois Extension*

## **Use Ceremonies to Build Cohesiveness Among 4-H Members**

Participation in ceremonies produces a sense of kinship among the members of an organization (i.e., we believe in the same things and we're in this together). Depending on their nature, ceremonies may also foster teamwork, reinforce expectations, proclaim an organization's values to the general public or provide recognition to members. For ceremonies commonly used by clubs see *4-H New Member Initiation Ceremony* (Toolkit 9) and *4-H Club Officer Installation Ceremony* (Toolkit 9).

## Evaluate Meetings Regularly and Take Action When Problems Arise

After the group has been meeting for four to six months, take a close look at how things are going.

The *Essential Elements Planning Tool* (available on-line at <http://4htools.cals.arizona.edu/assessmentTool.cfm>) should be used with club leaders, members and parents mid-way through the club year (February/March) to gain their perspective on club meetings and experiences, inform plans for improvement, and/or reinforce what the club is currently doing.

This tool must be completed again at the end of the 4-H club year (September) and results submitted to the Regional Extension Office, along with the application for Charter renewal. Even though every effort has been made to keep things running smoothly, problems will occasionally arise. When they do, it is important to address them as soon as possible, before they get out of hand.

The key to effective problem solving is identifying the cause. If you don't know why the problem exists you are likely to be merely "treating the symptom" rather than "curing the disease." Toolkit 10, *Troubleshooting 4-H Problems*, describes some common 4-H club problems, lists some possible causes and suggests alternative solutions.

## Involve the Parents

Everyone benefits when parents are involved in the 4-H club program:

- **4-H members** need their parents' support and encouragement to attend meetings, complete projects and fulfill responsibilities to the club.
- **Parents** have an opportunity to spend time with their children and

enjoy activities together. In many ways, 4-H is a "partner in parenting."

- **4-H leaders** have a lot to juggle. Being able to delegate some of those responsibilities, even the smallest ones, can be a big help.
- **The community** benefits when families support community-minded organizations like 4-H. Involved families are more knowledgeable about community issues and therefore more likely to support community efforts as well.

Keep these benefits in mind when you invite parents to become involved. Here are some suggestions on how, when and whom you ask. Additional ideas can be found in *Parents Can Help in Our 4-H Club* (Toolkit 11).

- **Meet with parents at the beginning of each year.** This parent meeting may take place before, after or as part of the club's planning meeting. While members should make the final decision about their projects and activities, it is important to know early in the year the ways in which parents can support the club program. Consider using the interest survey and/or activity sign-up sheet to encourage commitment and to keep track of everyone's interests and availability (Toolkit 12).
- **Maintain good communication.** In order for parents to feel like a part of the group and that they share responsibility for its success, they must be kept informed about the "when, where and whys" of both the club's activities and the 4-H club program in general.

Some ways you can stay connected with parents are:

- \* Ask parents to assist at club meetings on a rotating basis. You may even want to meet in the members' homes on a rotating basis.
- \* Encourage members to ask their parents for help when working on projects at home.
- \* Send information sheets home with members prior to special activities such as project trainings.
- \* Make time to chat with parents whenever they bring their child to an activity.
- **Create opportunities to get to know parents better.** For example, hold "parent nights" or "family days" during which members can "show-off" their accomplishments and parents can socialize with one another. Learn about their personal interests, hobbies and family activities. Later, requests for help can then be based on the things you know they enjoy and can do well.
- **When you need help:**
  - \* Ask an individual, basing your request on that person's interests, skills and abilities. Generic calls for help don't work!
  - \* Be honest and specific about the commitment and time frame.
  - \* Ask well in advance of when the job needs to be done.
- **Express your appreciation appropriately.** Regardless of how much or how little a parent has done, she/he deserves a "thank you." Whether it is delivered in the form of a phone call, a handwritten note or public recognition, that may include a certificate or

small gift, will depend on what was done and the person's personality— one size does not fit all!

## Involve Youth Leaders

Youth Leaders are 4-H teens who partner with adults to provide leadership for 4-H clubs and countywide 4-H activities. Depending on his or her age and experience, a youth leader can serve as general assistant, teach a project, mentor individual members, coordinate activities or assume almost any other 4-H leadership role under supervision of an adult.

Involving youth leaders in your club not only "lightens the load" for you, it also adds sparks of energy and enthusiasm, provides role models for your members and provides teens with valuable opportunity to practice their leadership skills. Refer to *Roles for Youth Leaders* (Toolkit 13) for ideas on how to get youth involved in clubs.

## Communication: An Important Two-Way Street

You will be receiving both regularly scheduled communications (such as a 4-H newsletter) and special mailings from the County and/or Regional Extension Office. Often they will contain registration instructions for up-coming events. Occasionally, they will request information needed by 4-H staff for reporting purposes.

The information you provide is important and submitting it on time, eliminates the need for duplicate mailings or phone calls that needlessly waste time and money.

Given the busy world we live in, it is very tempting to let our paperwork pile up until we have some "down time." (Does it ever come?) In the end, it is usually a lot

easier to take it one paper at a time. So please reply to 4-H mailings as soon after they arrive as possible. The following suggestions will also help to facilitate communication:

- **Note deadlines.** When you find a form in a 4-H mailing, immediately look for the deadline date and mark a day **at least two business days earlier on your calendar.** If you will need to gather information from members or parents and you will be having a club meeting before the deadline, it may be easiest to put the paperwork on the meeting agenda. If not, decide right away when and how you will collect the information you need.
- **Please call us.** If you are not sure you understand a question on a form or exactly how the information should be recorded, call **the person who sent you the form.** This is not being “pesky,” it is being helpful. Chances are that you are not the only person who is perplexed. Your call alerts the sender that there is a communication problem and provides an opportunity to clear it up for everyone.
- **Be aware of the schedule.** Certain information will be requested from you at the same time every year, and 4-H events that require registration also take place at about the same time each year. Anticipating the arrival of these mailings will help you to gather the needed information in advance.

- **Look for the expected mailing.** Checking up on the whereabouts of a mailing you were expecting to receive but did not, may help you avoid missing an opportunity. Things really do “get lost in the mail” sometimes. The two busiest times for paperwork are the beginning of the school year and prior to fair. Be on the look out!

