

4-H Projects



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Projects are a series of educational experiences and the foundation used by 4-H for helping youth develop life skills. By understanding the importance of project work, you will be better able to guide both the youth you work with and the project volunteers you recruit.

Developing Life Skills

The goal of 4-H programming is to provide developmentally appropriate projects and activities for youth to:

- Experience life skills.
- Practice them until they are learned.
- Be able to use them as necessary throughout a lifetime.

Through “learn-by-doing,” youth both learn and apply these skills appropriately. Life skills are nothing more than the abilities and skills that youth can learn to help them be successful in living a productive and satisfying life.

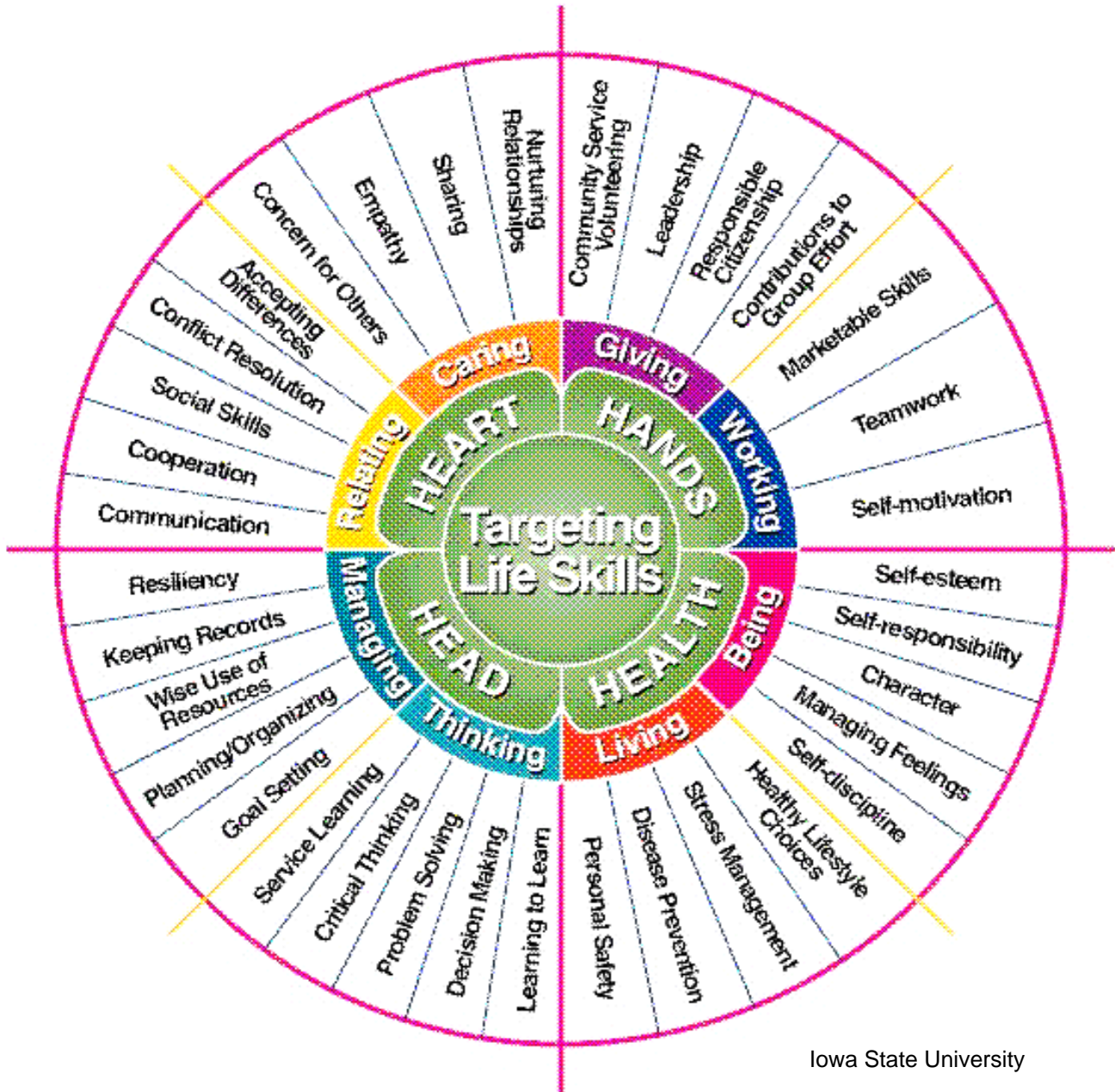
The *Targeting Life Skills* model developed by the Iowa Extension Service (following page) identifies life skills that are the goal of our 4-H experiences. Each 4-H experience should be planned with one or more of these skills in mind.

The Learning Environment

The 4-H club setting enhances the benefits of project participation by providing a positive learning environment. To help create a positive learning environment for 4-H members, keep the following in mind:

- Young people learn best in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.
- Members must have clear, self-determined goals.
- Each youth has different abilities. The same learning method will not be equally successful with all members.
- Learning requires motivation. Self-motivation comes from basic needs, personal preferences, and feelings of self-worth and belonging. External motivation is based on incentives and awards received from others.
- Youth must be actively involved in selecting and carrying out their learning activities.

Targeting Life Skills



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- Self-evaluation (that is, the member's own assessment of his/her achievement and what is needed to "make the best better") is the most meaningful kind of evaluation.
- It is important to remember that while the printed project materials outline a variety of planned learning experience and activities, you also need to recognize, create, and build on "teachable moments".

Try these methods to enhance project learning:

- Encourage inquisitiveness, show where and how to find answers to questions.
- Brainstorm creative solutions.
- Ask questions.
- Encourage members to become more independent and make their own decisions.
- Encourage individual expression within the group.
- Use a short, simple demonstration or illustrated talk.
- Involve members in role playing.
- Arrange a tour of personal interest to members (e.g., a food tour which shows where things come from or how they are used, etc.)
- Combine teaching methods that allow members to use all five senses.
- Praise and reward good work, interest, cooperation and the acceptance of responsibility.
- Avoid overly competitive situations.
- Avoid comparing efforts of one child to another.
- As appropriate, use games during meetings to increase energy level and fun.

The Leader's Guide (or Helper's Guide) for most 4-H projects will state the age group for which it was designed. Many projects have been developed in a series, with each level building on the previous.

This enables you to select activities from different levels of the same project to tailor learning experiences for members who are at different levels of development.

Encourage youth to select project activities that stretch their current abilities and are still appropriate for their developmental stage.

See the section on *Understanding Members* for information about understanding age-group characteristics. Note: Cloverbuds participate in activities rather than projects. (See the 4-H Cloverbud Leader Handbook for information.)

As the 4-H member grows in knowledge and experience, the leader's role should change gradually from experiences being more adult directed to being more member directed.

Selecting Projects and Materials

With over 50 projects to choose from (as listed in *4-H Today* and the back of the 4-H enrollment card), guiding members in their selections can be an overwhelming task. You may recruit other volunteers in your club or group to take on this task with the youth.

Consider the following when guiding a child in selecting a project:

- Interests, needs, and capabilities.
- Opportunity for sufficient challenges and growth.
- Availability of equipment, space, funding.
- Number of other members in the project.
- Availability of leadership for the project.

Youth may select as many projects as they like; however, it is more rewarding for youth to only select those that they can realistically complete. For younger members, two to three projects may be appropriate. Members are more likely to complete a project when:

- You set standards for performance together.
- They take part in planning what they will do to meet these standards.
- There is a caring adult to support and work with the youth.
- Group gatherings are friendly and fun.
- They feel they are important with important things to do.

Youth should be encouraged to utilize the variety of curriculum resources (*4-H PLUS* Sheets, records, manuals) that 4-H has available to them and then supplement with other resources as needed.

4-H PLUS Sheets provide basic information about the project area with resources and ideas listed to get youth started in the project. Records are designed as “Basic” or “Experienced” and are described in more detail later in this section.

Manuals or bulletins are designed specifically for the project area. They are mostly workbooks that guide the youth’s learning. Youth will also find it helpful to learn how to obtain and utilize other resources for their project work. Some ideas are listed on the 4-H PLUS sheets and in the manuals.

Encourage youth to learn from others in the club, volunteer project leaders or others in the community. Visit with your local Extension Staff for other available resources. Ask about the Minnesota 4-H Curriculum Guide and check out the Center for Youth Development’s web site (www.fourh.umn.edu) for other resources.

Setting Project Goals

Project goals are set at the beginning of the 4-H year to guide learning throughout the year. Goals should be based on what the member already knows and what they would like to learn. Ideas for things to do and learn can be found in 4-H resources (*PLUS* sheets, bulletins, manuals) or by talking to parents, project leaders, or other community members.

The project goal has three parts:

- Action—how you will do something;
- Results—what you are going to do; and
- Timetable—when you are going to do it.

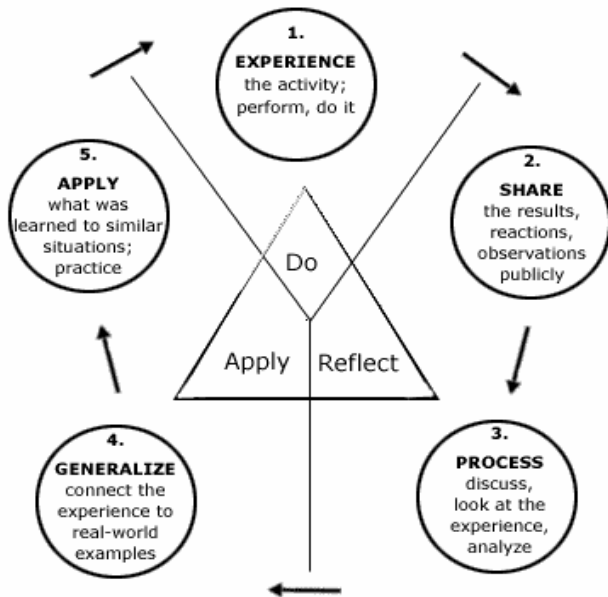
Examples of goals may be “I want to learn how to bake two kinds of cookies by January 1st” or “I want to train my dog to sit and lay down before the county dog show.” 4-H members should write goals down and share with parents and project leaders.

Acknowledgements: Getting the Most Out of the 4-H Project Experience: Developing Project Work, University of Florida. 4-H Project guide, North Dakota State University. Goal setting: Leader’s Guide to Helping Youth, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, 2000.

Experiential Learning in 4-H Projects

The 4-H program has a long history of involving youth in “**learning by doing**” activities. The **learn-by-doing activity** serves as the base for the Experiential Learning Process, which adds processing steps to help youth deepen the project learning. Much of the 4-H project literature is designed around the

experiential learning model. The experiential learning process is divided in five major steps.



- **Do:** Youth does the activity.
- **Share:** The youth shares what happened, the results of the experience and their feelings about it.
- **Process:** They decide what is important about what they did and learned from the experience. They analyze the experience and reflect back upon it to determine what was most important. Discuss how questions are created by the activity.
- **Generalize:** The young person personalizes the experience, determines why it is important and applies it to real life.
- **Apply:** Youth determine how what they learned can be applied to a similar or different situation.

Through experiential learning, youth learn subject matter content related to their projects. By experiencing the

process, they learned applies to the greater world and how their knowledge can be used in different situations later in their lives.

Questioning is the primary method of helping youth consciously move through the experiential learning steps.

Records

4-H record keeping is helpful in teaching important life skills, such as self-discipline, decision-making, goal setting, wise use of resources, communication, sharing, etc.

Record keeping encourages reflection — understanding and thinking about the how’s and why’s of an experience or activity— which enables youth to apply their learning in other situations. MN 4-H divides record keeping into “Basic” and “Experienced” levels so youth can select which best fits their needs.

Record keeping contains four basic elements: Preparing, Doing, Sharing and Reflecting.

Preparing is done at the beginning of a project. Youth develop goals and plans for accomplishing them.

Doing encourages the youth to keep track of progress and details of their work along the way, noting challenges and successes.

Sharing is one of the important values developed through 4-H. Each youth is encouraged to have some element of sharing their project or activity with others. Younger youth may feel most comfortable sharing just within their own club or group. More experienced youth may share their project work through service to their community.

Reflecting may take the form of a story or journal that encourages the thoughtful looking back at the youth's experience and naming the learning and growth that has happened over time.

Some clubs devote time at meetings for helping members with their records periodically throughout the year.

Role of Project Leaders

Project leaders are caring adults or older youth, that focus on the positive development of each youth by using project experiences as the tool.

Many 4-H clubs will recruit parents, other adults and older youth to become project leaders. Project leaders work more closely with the youth in the group who have enrolled in that specific project for the year.

Club project leaders are challenged to guide individual members and conduct two to five project experiences for them. These may be meetings before, after or as part of regular group meetings; tours to appropriate places for the project; work sessions at their home; etc.

Project leaders, older youth or a professional in your community may come as a guest presenter for a project or club meeting.

The local Extension Office may have specialized resources for project training; check it out.

Remember it is important that leadership in your club/group be shared, not only for your own well being, but also to develop leadership skills in others.

Showcasing Project Work

Many 4-Hers look forward to the opportunity of exhibiting their project work at the county fair or achievement day. Exhibiting at a county fair or achievement day is not a requirement of being enrolled in 4-H or project work. These experiences are just another opportunity for project learning. Project evaluation and recognition happens in any of a variety of ways.

Exhibits at a Minnesota 4-H exhibition, especially the non-livestock projects, are evaluated utilizing conference judging. Youth bring a representation of their work in each project to an evaluator who will have a personal conference with each youth.

Conferences generally focus on the growth and development of the youth, as well as, the quality of their project's product. Evaluators may even ask specific questions from the recommended 4-H curriculum for the project.

Evaluation guide sheets for various projects are available so youth can become more comfortable with the process ahead of time.

Your support, reinforcement and encouragement add to the depth and meaning of their experience: *How'd it go? What did you learn from the evaluator? Do you have some ideas to try next year? Way to Go! You've come a long way this year!* Remember, this is a learning experience for the youth. Not everyone can come away with purple ribbons but with your help, everyone will come away a winner!

Celebration

Recognition is important in positive youth development. Everyone needs to feel valued for his/her contribution. Many clubs/groups find ways throughout the year and at the end of the year, to recognize the work of the youth.

Having youth give a short show and tell or demonstration about their project, tours to homes, exhibiting at meetings or with other clubs and then celebrating their progress might be examples.

Other clubs present medals, pins, pencils, etc. at the end of the year for every project completed. Whatever your club decides to do, be sure to avoid equating the worth of project achievements with worth of the youth.

Remember, in 4-H, we are less concerned with the volume of the project content taught than about the volume of caring and nurturing of the youth. The youth need to know that in 4-H they can find someone they can count on, someone who is there when they need a person for support in their project work.

