Letter 2: Getting Started With a 4-H Club

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Dear Leader:

This letter has answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about starting a 4-H club. If you are a new leader in an on-going 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 youngsters as the leaders feel can be effectively included in the group. This decision depends on the number of leaders involved with the club and how they share the leadership. Some suggest that 6 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 also will depend upon what the club will be doing and where the meetings will be held. Limit your first group to a number in which you and the other leaders feel comfortable.

How to 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 own children or other children you know and their friends. You can contact your local schools or churches for potential members. Your local University of Illinois Extension office may have names of children who want to join a club in your area. The unit 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, Extension educators may be available to train you upon request.

University of Illinois Extension has initiated a selection procedure for any volunteers involved directly with youth. This procedure is for the protection of youth participants and volunteers. It includes completion of the Extension Volunteer Application, reference checks, and an interview. Make sure you discuss the volunteer screening procedures with your unit staff or mentor.

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.

**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 must 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.

**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 from joining just because of a misleading name. “The Sewing Susans” 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 Extension office to determine if the name is appropriate. 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 Extension unit 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 units 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.

After your club enrollment has been submitted to your Extension unit office you will receive a membership card for each member and leader of your club.

**What about project materials?**

Each Extension unit office will have copies of *The Illinois Clover* for each family, and may have a local 4-H project list. If you have not received your copy of *The Illinois Clover*, please ask for one.

University of Illinois Extension provides publications and project manuals at cost to the units. Some units may charge clubs a service fee or charge for individual publications; others may use local funds; still, others may use a
combination of methods. Check with your unit office to find out how publication costs are handled in your area.

**Are there dues for 4-H members?**

4-H members do not have to pay dues to the state or national organization. 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 Extension unit staff about fund-raising guidelines and policies in your area. Also, they may have information as to the kinds of activities that have been successful fund-raisers in the past.

**What about insurance?**

Liability coverage is provided by the University of Illinois for officially-enrolled adult volunteers who are conducting authorized 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 Illinois on an excess basis for all adult volunteers while participating in scheduled and supervised 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 Illinois 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 mentor or Extension staff can provide information and applications.

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

**Your Unit Staff of University of Illinois Extension**

**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 Illinois Extension staff and other leaders:
