Letter 6: Opportunities for 4-H Leaders

In this letter you'll find:
- Information about Youth leaders
- Opportunities at the county/unit level
- Opportunities at the multi-unit, regional, and state level
- Opportunities at the regional and national level
- Other resources for 4-H leaders
- Thanks for volunteering!

Dear Leader:

As you become more comfortable with the various aspects of the 4-H program, you'll want to challenge yourself to take on new leadership experiences and training. You have probably discovered that, along with your members, you, too, are gaining new knowledge and skills.

There are many opportunities available for 4-H leaders to learn more about the 4-H program or a specific subject, make new friends, and to develop additional skills. Your county/unit 4-H newsletter will probably announce events as they occur, but you can ask about opportunities coming up.

Youth leaders

A possible source of leadership help with your club may be a youth leader. Older youth may provide leadership for a project, an activity, or help with the organization of the club. Some teens take on full responsibility for organization or project leadership. Club leadership gives members an opportunity to help others and to grow and develop skills and abilities through practice.

In some areas, the term “junior leader” is used for teens who take on formal club leadership roles. The exact age for young people to take on club leadership is flexible. Members who serve leaders should have the respect of the other club members. They need to be successful with their project work and to be responsible, showing concern for the club and the other members.

All members should be encouraged to take on leadership assignments from the beginning of their 4-H careers and to increase responsibility as their skills develop. Through this process, most members should be ready for formal leadership assignments in their teen years.

Opportunities at the county/unit level

New 4-H Leader Orientation: You may have already attended an orientation or new leader workshop conducted by your unit staff, Extension educator, and/or experienced volunteer. If not, find out when the next meeting will be held. Many units have a mentor leader approach that provides a coach who conducts local orientation just for the new club leader.

There are a variety of leader orientation sessions available to new volunteers. On-line sessions include 4-H Volunteer Orientation at: http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/4HOrientation.

The 4-H Overnight Chaperone Orientation is for any adult supervising youth during an overnight 4-H event. Training can be found at: http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/4hchaperone.
A 4-H Pledge – “Keeping Youth Safe” – is a child protection session that all new 4-H leaders should participate in after enrolling as a volunteer. The lesson provides information on child abuse and neglect and reporting procedures.

The VALUED Volunteer Orientation Program is a series of six one-hour modules offered to new leaders through face-to-face meetings, online sessions, and toll-free teleconferences. Topics include volunteer role in 4-H, club organization, program planning, positive youth development, communications in a club, and experiential learning. Contact your local Extension office for details.

Cloverbud volunteers should participate also in the special 4-H Cloverbud orientation session designed specifically for volunteers working with youth ages 5-7.

Leader meetings: One of the best ways to stay up to date with the 4-H program, to learn new skills and to find out what other leaders are doing is by attending county/multi-county leader meetings. Units have regularly-scheduled organization leader meetings, held monthly or at least a couple of times a year. Project leader training may be general or for a specific project area in 4-H, such as animal science, visual arts, or horticulture.

County/Unit 4-H activities: Consider becoming a member of a planning committee or a volunteer organizer of one of the many county or unit level 4-H activities, such as fair superintendent or assistant, contest coordinator, workshop teacher or director, camp counselor or day camp coordinator.

4-H leaders are the key to a successful 4-H program. Leaders who take an active part in county 4-H activities help the program to be successful and find they become more effective leaders while developing their own skills.

County/Unit 4-H Committees: Each Extension unit has an Unit Extension Council that functions as an advisory group related to all unit programming. Many units have an organized group which meets on a regular basis to discuss the unit’s 4-H program, review 4-H activities, and plan 4-H programs and events. Committees or leader groups supporting the 4-H program vary by unit.

You can find out more about all aspects of the local 4-H program. Attend your unit’s 4-H leader meetings or talk with your unit staff or volunteer committee members.

Opportunities at the multi-unit, regional, and state level

4-H Leaders Forums: Multi-unit, regional and/or state volunteer forums are educational activities held annually or every two years for adult and youth leaders. Many workshops are offered that focus on general leadership skill development, club organization and specific 4-H project areas.

Regional Committees: Some areas of Illinois offer opportunities for volunteers to be involved in planning and conducting multi-county events and programs. Talk to your unit staff if you have specific interests.

State Fair: State Fair offers many opportunities for volunteers. A Junior Department Advisory Committee makes recommendations for future Junior exhibit directions. Units or counties may apply to prepare window displays to inform the public of members’ activities and projects. Volunteers are needed to plan these displays. In addition, adults can help daily, greeting the public, or for longer periods with judging, dorm management, or overseeing exhibits.

Judges’ Workshops: Fair or show judges’ training workshops are conducted periodically in areas of the state. They are usually open to volunteer leaders. Extension unit offices receive announcements about upcoming judges’ workshops.
Opportunities at the regional and national level

North Central Regional 4-H Forum: Every year a North Central Regional 4-H Volunteer Forum is held in one of the 12 north central states, usually in October or November. The program features two days of informative seminars, speakers, tours, and an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with other 4-H leaders from the North Central Region.

Scholarship Assistance: Some counties and the Illinois 4-H Foundation have limited scholarship assistance available for leaders who apply for area, state, or regional workshops. Information is available at your Extension office.

National 4-H Center: The National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland, near Washington, D.C., is available for 4-H leaders or members to stay with their families while visiting the nation's capital. Reservations must be made in advance.

Other resources for 4-H leaders

Middle Management and/or Master Volunteers: Some Extension volunteers receive training in a specific subject area and become a “master” in that area. Examples of Illinois programs are Master Gardener and Master Food Preserver. Other management volunteers are trained to work through others to achieve goals. They organize unit events and activities. Frequently they provide leadership to a curriculum area for a county or unit. Others mentor new leaders. Management Volunteers work between salaried staff and volunteers who conduct local, on-going programs. Both of these types of specialized volunteers may serve as resources to you and your club.

Publications and audio-visuals: In addition to the various materials listed in these letters, you'll find numerous publications and audio-visual aids available through your unit office. 4-H at various levels is now making large volumes of information available on the internet. Some of the resources you might want to check out include:

- **The Illinois Clover** contains information and project listings for 4-H’ers and families. It also has listings of leader guides and other publications for use by leaders and other volunteers.

- **Illinois Leader newsletter** contains an update on what is happening in Illinois 4-H, ideas to assist with club leadership, and opportunities for 4-H leaders and clubs. It is prepared by the State 4-H office and sent to the unit offices for distribution every two months.

- **National 4-H Source Book** lists gifts, clothing, resource materials and award items with the 4-H emblem which can be ordered from the National 4-H Council.

- **Leader’s Guides** are offered with many of the 4-H projects in which 4-H’ers may enroll. These guides provide guidance on working with members and extra information to volunteers who are helping youth in specific project areas. Look for the listing of these guides along with the projects in *The Illinois Clover*. Leaders will receive a copy the first year they enroll as a project leader in the project.

- **Getting Started As a 4-H Project Leader** (L90530) is a guide for project leaders of any project. It explains the project leader’s role and has suggestions for guiding members through their projects.

- **Helping You Help Youth** is a series of guide sheets that contain helpful hints for adults who are working with young people. Some of the titles are *Communicating with Youth*, *Others Can Help*, *Helping 4-H Members Select Projects*, *Understand Their Own Culture & Appreciate Other Cultures*, *Involve Caring Adults in 4-H*, and *Avoiding a Can of Worm: Risk Management for 4-H Clubs/Groups*. These are available also at: [www.4-H.uiuc.edu](http://www.4-H.uiuc.edu).

- **Leader's Handbooks** are available in many units. They usually contain policies, rules and suggestions for leaders in that unit.

- **Project and Culture Kits**, are collections of items that stimulate study and exploration of a
project or a country’s culture. Project kits include materials that are difficult to obtain and samples and models that help leaders conduct project meetings. Examples of the items included in the culture kits are: maps, coins, flags, clothing, recipes, games, and common household items. They provide activities that can interest members for several hours. The project kits available vary by location. Project committees are encouraged to develop new kits. Cultural kits are placed in each region of the state each year.

4-H Web Sites: New web pages for 4-H are being developed daily. The Illinois 4-H site at: www.4-H.uiuc.edu includes information especially for 4-H leaders along with resources for the public, members and staff. University of Illinois Extension’s site at www.extension.uiuc.edu gives links to state and county Extension programs. The National 4-H Web site maintained by USDA is www.national4-hheadquarters.gov. National 4-H Council’s page is www.fourhcouncil.edu. Another national Web site, www.4-HUSA.org, has links to state pages as well as news from counties and clubs throughout the nation.

Other resources for 4-H leaders: As you can tell from these letters, great resources for new leaders are your Extension unit staff, your area's Extension educators, and other volunteer leaders. Don't hesitate to ask them for ideas, information, and assistance. They can be contacted through your unit office.

We hope the information in these letters has been helpful to you. We know it is a challenge to be a 4-H leader, and we also know it can be one of the most rewarding experiences you will have—helping young people develop into successful, caring, and productive citizens.

Welcome to the role of volunteer 4-H leader!

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 Extension staff and other leaders:

Thanks for volunteering!

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