



WISCONSIN 4-H CHARTERS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

October 2008

What are 4-H Charters?

The University of Wisconsin-Extension grants 4-H Charters, which formally recognize a group's affiliation with 4-H and grant that group the following privileges:

- Authorization to use the 4-H name and emblem.
- Opens eligibility for inclusion under National 4-H tax exempt status.
- Authorization to raise, allocate, and disburse funds in support of local 4-H programs, projects, and groups.

What groups are required to have a 4-H Charter?

The United States Department of Agriculture requires all 4-H groups to have a charter signed by the Director of the National 4-H Headquarters and issued by the state 4-H office. Beginning with the 2009-10 4-H enrollment year, the following 4-H groups in Wisconsin must have a 4-H Charter. Each of these 4-H groups must also renew its charter annually.

- All 4-H clubs including school-based clubs.
- County, district, and state 4-H volunteer leader associations and councils or their equivalent.
- County, district, and state 4-H volunteer committees or groups or their equivalent that 4-H name and emblem and handle finances.
- In general, any group of 4-H members who are organized as a specific club or volunteer-based groups that use the 4-H name and/or handle 4-H funds should be chartered.

4-H Programs versus 4-H Groups:

A distinction must be made between 4-H clubs and groups and 4-H programs. 4-H school-enrichment programs, special-interest programs and after-school programs are presently not required to have charters. These programs are not organized using the club/group delivery method. However, if an after-school program includes an after-school 4-H club, then that club must be chartered.

What is a 4-H club?

According to the Wisconsin 4-H Policies, a 4-H club must meet the following components:

- Club name
- Five or more youth from at least three families
- Adult leadership that has been approved through the Youth Protection process
- Educational plan which meets the purposes of the 4-H program
- Youth involvement in leadership and decision-making
- Meet on a continuing basis
- Have written operating guidelines, bylaws or constitution approved by the members to govern the club
- Open to any youth eligible for 4-H membership, regardless of race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, disability, ancestry, sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital or parental status.

A 4-H Club may have either paid or volunteer leadership. Teen leadership does not meet the adult leadership requirement. 4-H clubs must have an educational mission. Evidence can be provided in different ways. The preferred method is for clubs to develop a program plan with their members, and provide a written copy of that plan to the members and the UW-Extension office. All 4-H clubs must comply with federal and state nondiscrimination laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

What are the minimum requirements to charter a new 4-H club?

1. Meet the aforementioned minimum requirements for a 4-H club.
2. Signed enrollment forms on file for all member and volunteer leaders, and adult leaders must be approved through the Youth Protection process. Enrollment forms include the volunteer behavior expectations for adult volunteer leaders.
3. Complete a New 4-H Club Charter Application Form or Charter Renewal and submit it to the County UW-Extension office.

What are the minimum requirements for the annual 4-H Charter renewal for clubs?

1. Continue to meet the minimum requirements for a 4-H club.
2. Signed enrollment forms on file for all member and volunteer leaders, and adult leaders must be approved through the Youth Protection process. Enrollment forms include the volunteer behavior expectations for adult volunteer leaders.
3. Complete and return the 4-H Club Charter Renewal Form For Existing 4-H Clubs by December 1 of the current 4-H year to the County UW-Extension office.

What are the minimum requirements to charter a new 4-H committee or group?

1. 4-H Youth Development Professionals will need to decide which 4-H committee and/or groups need to be chartered in their county.
2. Chartering should be based on the degree of autonomy that the 4-H committee or group has. The more autonomous the committee or group is, the more accountable they will need to be and therefore should be chartered. All groups or committees that handle finances and have a checkbook must be chartered.
3. Signed enrollment forms on file for all member and volunteer leaders, and adult leaders must be approved through the Youth Protection process. Enrollment forms include the volunteer behavior expectations for adult volunteer leaders.
4. Complete and submit the Charter Application Form for New Committees/Groups to the County UW-Extension office.

What are the minimum requirements for the annual 4-H Charter renewal for committees and groups?

1. Continue to meet the minimum requirements for a 4-H committee or group.
2. Signed enrollment forms on file for all member and volunteer leaders, and adult leaders must be approved through the Youth Protection process. Enrollment forms include the volunteer behavior expectations for adult volunteer leaders.
3. Complete and submit the Charter Application Form for New Committees/Groups to the County UW-Extension office.

How does a 4-H group receive a charter and renewal?

The organizational leader of a 4-H group submits the appropriate charter application or renewal form to the County UW-Extension office. Groups that are district or state level will submit their charter application or renewal form to the State 4-H Youth Development office. The county or state 4-H staff member will approve and present the charter certificate to the 4-H group.

Please see below to determine the appropriate form. Forms should be submitted to the county UW-Extension office.

Type of 4-H Group

- New 4-H Club
- New 4-H Committee/Group
- Existing 4-H Club
- Existing 4-H Committee

Charter Form

- Charter Application Form for New Clubs
- Charter Application Form for New Committees/Groups
- Charter Renewal Form for Existing 4-H Clubs
- Charter Application Form for Existing Committees/Groups

When should a 4-H group seek a charter?

4-H charters are issued when establishing a 4-H entity. Charters are to be renewed annually. All Wisconsin 4-H groups listed above must have a charter by January, 2010.

An existing 4-H group that has documentation of an existing charter may continue to operate under its present charter as long as the group meets the minimum Wisconsin 4-H charter requirements for groups listed above and is operating under the original group name for which it was chartered.

If an existing 4-H group does not have a charter, the organizational leader should work with the group and the county or state 4-H staff member to meet the charter requirements. An existing 4-H group that has misplaced its charter certificate should reapply for a charter. Charter renewal packets are due by December 1 of the current 4-H enrollment year.

For new 4-H groups, applications for 4-H Charters can be submitted at any time during the year.

How long is the 4-H Charter valid?

A 4-H Charter is valid for the calendar year in which it is issued, January 1 - December 31. Groups can maintain their charters each year by complying with the renewal requirements. Beginning in 2009 all chartered 4-H groups must submit a charter renewal form by December 1 of each year.

What circumstances might result in the loss of a 4-H Charter?

Failure to meet the minimum 4-H group charter requirements or the renewal requirements, changes in the 4-H group name, disbanding or separation of the group into multiple entities, or failure to follow Wisconsin Cooperative Extension/4-H policies can result in the loss of a 4-H Charter.

The 4-H staff member providing leadership to the 4-H group, in consultation with the State 4-H Youth Development Program Director has the right to revoke a 4-H group's charter in their county. 4-H groups may re-apply for a charter.

After a group loses its charter (for whatever reason) it can no longer use the 4-H name or emblem or raise, allocate, or disburse funds in support of 4-H programs. The group no longer has tax exempt status.

When the actions of a volunteer on behalf of a group results in the loss of the group's charter, the other members and leaders are still eligible to continue their involvement in 4-H by affiliating with a different chartered 4-H group.

What are the 4-H group leader's responsibilities as related to 4-H Charters?

- Be informed of the requirements for chartering 4-H groups.
- If serving as a leader of an existing 4-H group, ensure that it has a valid charter by checking with the 4-H staff member providing leadership to the 4-H group.
- If the 4-H group does not have a valid charter, take the necessary steps to bring it into compliance as a Wisconsin 4-H chartered group.
- If serving as a leader of a new 4-H group, work with the 4-H staff member in your local Extension office to become chartered.
- Make sure that the 4-H group renews its charter annually by December of each year.
- Inform the appropriate 4-H staff member if the 4-H group no longer complies with the charter requirements or no longer wishes to be a chartered 4-H group.

What are the responsibilities of the County 4-H Staff Member as related to 4-H Charters?

- Be informed of the requirements for chartering 4-H groups.
- Provide 4-H Charter and Renewal information to all 4-H groups in your county such as clubs, leaders associations, committees, etc.
- Assist new 4-H groups in your county in completion of the charter and renewal applications.
- Process charter applications for 4-H groups.
- Present 4-H groups in your county with their charter certificate. Keep a copy in 4-H group files.
- Make sure that all of the chartered 4-H groups in your county renew their charters annually by December 1.
- Provide educational support for 4-H clubs, committees and groups that are having difficulty completing their application packets. Open communication and educational support is expected. This may include a phone call or meeting with the group's leadership. It may include training and guidance.
- Revoke the charter of 4-H groups for failure to comply with charter requirements discussed in this publication.
- Maintain current records of the status of chartered groups in your county. This is reported to the State 4-H office in your annual 4-H Name and Emblem Use and Expansion and Review Report, due annually on January 15 to the State 4-H Youth Development Program Director.
- Assure that multi-county and district 4-H groups that your county is involved in are chartered.

What are the responsibilities of the State 4-H Youth Development Office and State 4-H Staff members with 4-H Charters?

- Monitor and revise as necessary, the policies for chartering 4-H groups.
- Work with advising 4-H Youth Development staff members to provide 4-H charter information to all district and state-level 4-H groups.
- Assist where necessary to ensure existing district and state-level 4-H groups all have a valid charter before January, 2010.
- Assist new 4-H groups at the district and state level to become chartered.
- Process charter applications for district and state 4-H groups.
- Present district and state 4-H groups with charter certificates. Maintain records in 4-H group files.
- Assist in assuring that all district and state chartered 4-H groups renew their charters annually.
- Consult with county 4-H staff members concerning charter renewal and support issues including charter revocation of local 4-H groups.
- Revoke the charter of district and state 4-H groups for failure to comply with charter requirements discussed in this publication.
- In cooperation with advising 4-H Youth Development staff members, maintain current records of the status of chartered groups at the district and state level.
- Assist counties with charter records maintenance and reporting.
- Report charter statistics to National 4-H Headquarters as required.

Adapted by Kevin Palmer, 4-H Youth Development Agent and the Wisconsin 4-H Strengthening the Vitality of 4-H Community Clubs Team, Club Development Action Team, with permission of the author: "4-H Charters: Frequently Asked Questions" by Joseph R. Hunnings, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development, Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2006.

Additional sources: Wisconsin 4-H Policies

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/resources/policies/documents/WI4HYouthDevelPolicies608.pdf> and National 4-H Headquarters Fact Sheet: Charters: The Key to Official Recognition. http://www.national4-headquarters.gov/library/4h_polregs.htm



An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and American with Disabilities (ADA) requirements. © 2008 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Developed by the Wisconsin 4-H Office, 431 Lowell Hall, 610 Langdon St., Madison, WI 53703. The 4-H name and emblem are federally protected under Title 18 US Code 707.