



COUNTY 4-H LEADER ORGANIZATIONS AND THE COUNTY 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL

Revised April 2007

The Link Between the 4-H Leader Organization and Cooperative Extension, UW-Extension

4-H Leader Organizations

County 4-H Leader Organizations have strengthened youth development in Wisconsin since the 1920s. According to J. M. Mackey, former State 4-H Program leader, the organizations were designed “to strengthen the volunteer leader concept by encouraging unified county programs, provide leader training on a county basis and to relieve Extension agents of much of the detail of enrolling members and conducting local club programs.” Mackey goes on to say that “The importance of a county organization of leaders, and perhaps a federation of clubs within a county, has been demonstrated as the most efficient way of promoting a substantial and lasting 4-H program.”

Today, the 4-H Leader Organization is designed to promote more youth development opportunities for boys and girls in urban, rural and suburban areas; and to extend the number of volunteers.

The 4-H Leader Organization can help in the following roles:

- **Conduct Supplemental Programs for Youth**
Establish educational opportunities for youth beyond the club level, including camp, member exchanges, county fair, and project activities.
- **Support Volunteer Education**
Conduct adult and youth volunteer training, provide financial support for volunteer education and promote volunteer development via meetings, newsletters and phone.
- **Manage Budget and Raise Funds to Support 4-H Youth Development Work**
Develop and manage a budget that support 4-H Youth Development work. Do fundraising to support these budgets.
- **Coordinate County Level Recognition**
Develop meaningful recognition for young people and volunteers.
- **Represent 4-H Youth Development to the Community**
Establish a promotion committee or Ambassador program.
- **Advocate 4-H Youth Development with Public Officials**
Maintain personal contact with government officials so they understand the benefits of 4-H.

- Advise County 4-H Program Development
Explore new 4-H youth development opportunities and challenges. Provide advice on youth and volunteer needs and issues. Work to ensure that all youth participating in Extension youth groups (4-H community club, after-school groups and other program models) have equal access to 4-H Youth Development programs.

4-H Leader Organizations are not responsible for the hiring or supervision of 4-H Youth Development Staff.

The 4-H Leader Organization Board of Directors

While County 4-H Leader Organizations are structured in a variety of ways, many operate with a board of directors. Leadership roles that the board provides include:

- Organizational Planning
The board understands the purpose of the 4-H Leader Organization, has a vision of how their organization should operate and establishes steps to make these visions happen.
- Policy Making that Relates to the 4-H Leader Organization
The by-laws should give direction to how the local 4-H Leader Organization policies are developed and communicated. The board often makes recommendations on policy issues for discussion and action by the organization's membership.
- Enforcement of Policies and Grievance Handling
The board works closely with Cooperative Extension to assure the local 4-H Leader Organization is in compliance with County, State and Federal policies and laws. When a youth, volunteer, or participating family has a grievance related to 4-H Leader Organization policies, the board should have a procedure for addressing those concerns.
- Legal Responsibilities
The business of the organization needs to be accurately recorded and reported to the membership. Board members should avoid conflict of interest questions by abstaining on votes in which they might personally gain.
- Financial Responsibilities
Budget development and oversight, banking and check writing are important board roles, and are not carried out by the 4-H Youth Development staff member. The board needs to involve the larger membership in budget adoption, fund raising commitments, and annual audits. The board assures compliance with Federal and State tax reporting requirements.

4-H groups and associations are accountable to Cooperative Extension for their activities and finances. Their continuing existence is dependent upon Cooperative Extension's authorization and oversight. 4-H youth development volunteers are expected to abide by the behavior standards established by UW-Extension/4-H, and to conduct themselves as positive role models for youth. All 4-H youth development volunteers are ultimately accountable to UW-Extension for their 4-H-related activities.

The 4-H Youth Development Professional's Role: A Partner to the 4-H Leader Organization and Board of Directors

The 4-H Youth Development Professional works with the County 4-H Leader Organization and board of directors as:

- **Educator**
The 4-H Youth Development Professional teaches content in youth development, organization building, and volunteer development through informal conversations, phone calls, newsletters, group presentations, participation in meetings and development of educational materials.
- **Advisor**
The 4-H Youth Development Professional has an understanding of the countywide 4-H Youth Development program. Working to ensure open and equal access to all county youth, the professional assists others in understanding a variety of perspectives. The professional helps clarify the impact of decisions on all stakeholders, both internal and external, while working to ensure that local decisions comply with federal and state nondiscrimination laws and policies.
- **Link to Larger System**
4-H Youth Development Professionals are the link to the larger 4-H Youth Development and UW-Extension system. They have knowledge of state and national resources, new programs, policies and sources of training. They report local progress and concerns to state staff supporting the work of the county 4-H program. Materials, educational opportunities, policies and advice come to the county from the state and national level through the professional.
- **Mission Guardian**
The 4-H Youth Development Professional is responsible for assuring that all programs bearing the 4-H name and emblem are consistent with the mission and goals of Cooperative Extension's 4-H program.
- **Other Professional Roles**
Other 4-H Youth Development Professional roles include youth development programming in the community; promotion of outreach 4-H programming such as after-school 4-H clubs, summer youth programs, community garden programs, community youth leadership groups, and short-term programs taking place in the community.

Looking to the Future

Questions that the 4-H Leader Organization should consider include:

- What kind of voice do youth have in decision making and leadership in the County 4-H Leader Organization? How can youth and adult volunteers partner in leadership roles?
- How can the 4-H Leader Organization create an atmosphere which welcomes the participation of any Extension youth group?
- How might our organization benefit from having people outside of 4-H serve on our board? For example, could we use outside legal or financial assistance?
- How do we ensure that 4-H community clubs meet the needs of the 21st century families which include single parents and youth in shared custody families?

Additional Resources

Department of Agriculture. (1987). The 4-H Name and Emblem: Guidelines for Authorized Use. Washington, DC: Extension Service.

Department of Agriculture. (1993). Tax Exempt Status of 4-H Organizations Authorized to Use the 4-H Name and Emblem. (Program Aid Number 1282). Washington, DC: Extension Service.

Mackey, J. M. (1977). An Historical Study of the Impact of Certain Socio-economic Factors on 4-H Youth Programs in Wisconsin. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin)

Wessel, T., and Wessel, M. (1982) 4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council.



An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and American with Disabilities (ADA) requirements. © 2004 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.