

# Facts About 4-H

## Understanding the Basics



### What is 4-H?

4-H is the largest out-of-school youth program in the United States. There are more than 6 million 4-H members nationwide, and thousands of young people participate in Oregon 4-H each year. Through 4-H, young people learn and grow in partnership with caring adults to develop the skills and confidence needed to become contributing, productive, self-directed members of society. Because 4-H uses an active, learn-by-doing approach, young people see how their actions make a difference in the lives of others and the world around them.

4-H is also the only nationwide youth organization administered through land-grant universities. In Oregon, 4-H is affiliated with Oregon State University. At the local level, OSU faculty members who live or work in the community they serve provide leadership and oversight of 4-H. These faculty members have extensive training in youth development principles and also are in touch with the needs of the community's young people. Volunteers who work with 4-H are invited to do so only after they undergo extensive background checks. They must also participate in training that includes topics such as club organization, risk management, and working with youth.

At the national level, 4-H is administered through a special office of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture in Washington, D.C.

### Who Can Participate?

#### Members

4-H membership is open to all youth enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or marital/parental status. 4-H eligibility ends on December 31 of the year in which a young person turns 19. Certain 4-H experiences, such as handling large animals and participating in competitive events, are limited to youth of specific ages. A young person must knowingly participate in at least 6 hours of positive youth development experiences annually to be considered a 4-H member. These experiences must be planned, organized, and conducted by faculty, staff, or volunteers of the OSU Extension Service. The Extension office serving the county in which the young person is enrolled maintains documentation of enrollment.

#### Volunteers

In addition to the paid faculty and staff who provide leadership to 4-H, more than 5,000 adult and teen volunteers offer their time and talents to Oregon 4-H. These volunteers often have considerable project-based knowledge, and many also have extensive experience working with young people. However, such knowledge and experience are not required. New volunteers receive a comprehensive orientation and training specific to their role with 4-H.

Volunteering is not a one-size-fits-all experience. There are hundreds of different volunteer roles available in 4-H. Some volunteers assist with a single event or activity annually, and others commit to ongoing service as mentors, coaches, or club leaders. Some volunteers coordinate other volunteers or serve on advisory councils and planning committees.

## Our Approach

4-H practices positive youth development. This concept is based on the belief that positive outcomes for young people don't happen by chance. Instead, it is up to parents, schools, youth organizations, and the entire community to help young people learn and grow.

In 4-H, young people can learn about a wide variety of subjects ranging from robotics and climate to animal science and financial management. They also learn life skills such as public speaking, record keeping, and leadership. Experiential approaches allow youth to actively engage with the content, reflect on what they've done, and use what they've learned to further hone their skills.

Learning is important, but the environment in which learning occurs is crucial. Consequently, 4-H goes to great lengths to ensure that the experiences it offers help young people meet key developmental needs. We meet needs for **mastery** by ensuring that youth are recognized for achievement in appropriate ways. We meet needs for **independence** by allowing them to make decisions and accept responsibility for their choices. We meet needs for **generosity** by providing opportunities for young people to help others. We meet needs for **belonging** by helping youth establish positive relationships with peers and adults.

When young people learn content in a supportive and nurturing environment, they build competence, confidence, connection, compassion, and character.

## Engagement Strategies

4-H engages young people through a variety of activities including clubs, camps, school enrichment, and short-term experiences.

**Clubs** are organized in communities and schools. They may meet during or outside of the school day and can focus on a single project or multiple projects. Clubs should strive to enroll at least five youth from at least three different families and plan to meet at least six times per year. Members typically elect officers to help lead the club. Clubs must be chartered, nondiscriminatory, and led by an approved volunteer; they also must abide by the guidelines for use of the 4-H name and emblem. Young people may participate in organized 4-H clubs beginning in fourth grade.

**4-H camps** promote positive youth development by engaging young people in a group living experience outdoors. Overnight camps involve at least one overnight stay away from home. Day camps are multiple-day experiences during which youth return home each evening.

**School enrichment programs** are designed to support or enhance an approved school curriculum and generally are conducted during the school day. Extension faculty, staff, and trained volunteers, including teachers, can serve as instructors.

**Special interest and short-term programs** engage young people in focused learning experiences led by Extension faculty, staff, or trained volunteers. These short-term experiences do not meet the criteria to be considered 4-H clubs or school enrichment programs.

**Cloverbud** programs are the mechanism by which young people in kindergarten through third grade participate in 4-H. These programs introduce youth to cooperative learning and opportunities available in 4-H. Cloverbud members do not participate in competitive events and are not allowed to have contact with large animals as part of their 4-H experience. Cloverbud groups do not elect officers.

## Project-Based Learning

4-H projects allow young people to learn through real-life experiences. Youth determine a course of action, actively experiment with potential solutions, and assess the effectiveness of their actions. Oregon 4-H members can select from many projects offered statewide or develop their own projects with the assistance of an adult volunteer leader. Projects are grouped into the areas of animal science, communications, expressive arts, family and consumer sciences, horticulture, leadership and citizenship, natural science, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), and outdoor recreation.

## 4-H Activities

4-H members not only belong to clubs but also may participate in fairs, contests, camps, conferences, workshops, tours, and trips. These activities are designed to supplement club and project experiences. They offer opportunities to learn and practice skills beyond the local club level and also allow

members to meet 4-H'ers from other clubs, communities, counties, states, and countries.

## How 4-H is Financed

4-H is supported by a unique combination of federal, state, and local tax funds and private gifts and donations. In Oregon, state and federal appropriations are used to pay salaries of Extension faculty and staff who lead the county-based programs. County funds support the operation of local Extension offices. Private funds received and managed by local 4-H associations or the Oregon 4-H Foundation help support 4-H activities such as camps, conferences, and workshops and also pay for awards, scholarships, and volunteer training.

## About the OSU Extension Service

Oregon State University is committed to extending the knowledge and resources of the university to the people of the state through various methods of outreach and engagement. Campus- and field-based Extension faculty and staff bring a piece of the university to almost all of the counties in Oregon. Specifically, the Extension Service connects Oregonians with research-based information that helps build local capacity to address important issues. 4-H faculty and staff are part of the OSU Extension Service.

## The Four H's

The four H's stand for **Head, Heart, Hands,** and **Health**, which represent the domains of youth development. Early symbols of the organization contained only three H's—for Head, Heart, and Hands. In 1911, club leaders from across the country met in Washington, D.C. and adopted a committee recommendation to add Hustle as a fourth H. O.B. Martin, who was directing club work in the South, is credited with suggesting that the four H's stand for Head, Heart, Hands, and Health.

## 4-H Emblem

The official 4-H emblem is a green four-leaf clover with the letter H on each leaf. Because of its historical importance, the 4-H emblem has a special status; it is federally protected under the U.S. Code (Section 18 USC 707) and belongs to Congress. Federal legislation regulates use of the 4-H name and emblem.

In Oregon, permission to use the emblem must be granted by the OSU Extension Service.

## 4-H Colors

The 4-H colors are green and white. Green represents growth, life, and youth. White symbolizes purity and high ideals.

## 4-H Motto

The 4-H motto, "To make the best better," was proposed by Carrie Harrison, a botanist with the U.S. Bureau of Plant Industry, and adopted in 1927 along with the 4-H pledge.

## 4-H Pledge

The pledge tells what 4-H is all about: the four-fold development of youth. Delegates to the 1927 National 4-H Club Camp in Washington, D.C. adopted the pledge, and state club leaders voted for and adopted the pledge for universal use. The phrase "and my world" was added in 1973. The saying of the pledge has a prominent place at 4-H club meetings, achievement days, and other events.

**"I Pledge my Head to clearer thinking,  
my Heart to greater loyalty,  
my Hands to larger service,  
and my Health to better living,  
for my club, my community, my country,  
and my world."**



## How 4-H Began

What is now 4-H began at the start of the 20th century, when boys' and girls' agriculture clubs formed in many places across the country. These early efforts occurred in rural schools or at farmers' institutes organized by agricultural colleges to demonstrate the latest scientific information. Some of the first states to become involved were New York, Ohio, Texas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, and Oregon.

In Oregon in 1904, L.R. Alderman, then Yamhill County school superintendent and later Oregon superintendent of public instruction, established a children's fair with programs in gardening, cooking, woodworking, raising farm animals, and other activities. Alderman and H.C. Seymour, Polk County school superintendent, expanded the idea, and by 1910, both counties had organized boys' and girls' industrial clubs. In 1913, the Oregon legislature appropriated funds for introducing boys' and girls' industrial clubs statewide under the state superintendent of public instruction.

In 1914, Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act, formally establishing Extension work on a cooperative basis among the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the state land-grant colleges, and counties in each state. Funds were included for youth programs, which became known as 4-H in 1924.

After Smith-Lever funds became available, the OSU Extension Service was given the responsibility for club work under an agreement with the state Department of Education. At that time, boys' and girls' industrial clubs were reorganized

to be similar to 4-H in other states. Boys and girls enrolled in projects on corn growing, potato growing, vegetables, poultry, pigs, dairy herd record keeping, sewing, cooking, canning, and woodworking.

Unlike most states, Oregon made 4-H available to city and rural youth from the early days. In fact, Portland is widely regarded as the first major city in the nation to have 4-H clubs; these clubs were formed under an agreement between OSU Extension and the Portland School District in 1920.

Through the 1930s, Oregon 4-H was closely allied with public schools. As late as 1948, many school superintendents were actively involved in organizing 4-H clubs, and teachers provided the primary adult leadership. As schools consolidated, enrollment increased, and larger districts formed, 4-H shifted to community-oriented clubs led by parents and other adult volunteers.

During World War II, 4-H members helped grow victory gardens in support of the troops abroad. In the 1960s and 1970s, 4-H expanded to the cities and suburbs; those decades also marked the beginning of global education and international exchange programs in 4-H.

Today, 4-H emphasizes nutrition and healthy living, civic engagement, sustainability, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education while maintaining support for traditional project areas, such as animal science, food, and horticulture.

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