



Extension FactSheet

4-H Youth Development, 2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210

Recognizing 4-H Members: Strategies for Volunteers



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Recognition is an essential part of the 4-H experience. Recognition improves the learning experience for both youth and adults. It is easy for volunteers to build recognition into the 4-H experience by using the *8 Key Elements of Positive Youth Development* as a framework for analyzing and improving their recognition efforts.

4-H is a diverse program with youth and volunteers who have different needs when it comes to recognition. Ohio State University Extension emphasizes the *8 Key Elements of Positive Youth Development* in all aspects of programming and recognizes the value in using this framework to build recognition within 4-H. This can boost the fun in your 4-H group for members, volunteers, and parents.

1. Positive Relationship with a Caring Adult

How young people come to understand what it means and what it takes to be a productive citizen, as well as the belief in themselves, depends largely on the adult role models and connection they have. A caring adult serves as a guide, mentor, and role model.

- Be flexible.
- Be patient.
- Take time to explain.
- Cultivate 4-H members' special interests.
- Utilize 4-H members' unique talents.
- Take an interest in personal lives (attend sporting events, band concerts, etc.).
- Ask youth to assist with workshop preparation.
- Write letters of reference.
- Attend personal celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.).

2. Safe Environment—Emotional and Physical

A welcoming environment is one that allows for a sense of belonging to develop, encourages and supports its members, and offers encouragement with positive and specific feedback.

- Be respectful.
- Be pleasant and appreciative.
- Say “thank you” publicly.

- Shake hands.
- Give a pat-on-the-back.
- Always use a person’s first name.
- Let each 4-H member know they were missed.
- Praise in public, especially in front of family and friends.
- Encourage others to express appreciation.
- Send 4-H members an “Encouragemint” (a candy mint with a note).
- Provide hats or shirts for all club members to promote unity.
- Ask an effective 4-H member to recruit another 4-H member who is “just like you.”

3. Opportunity for Mastery

Opportunities for success and achievement for youth serve as building blocks for a young person’s success not only in youth organizations but also in their school and community work. Mastery is the building of knowledge, skills, and attitudes and then demonstrating the competent use of the knowledge and skills. Through hands-on projects and activities, youth gain new knowledge and have the opportunity to immediately apply that new knowledge to individual projects and activities in which they are enrolled/engaged.

- Send a 4-H member to a conference.
- Nominate a 4-H member to teach a workshop at a conference or symposium.
- Provide scholarships to conferences.
- Ask a 4-H member to present a report or workshop on some aspect of a conference they attended.
- Establish a 4-H Honor Roll.
- Ask a 4-H member to speak to a donor.
- Ask a 4-H member to speak at a 4-H meeting.
- Ask a 4-H member to write a news article or release.
- Ask a 4-H member to make a television appearance or radio announcement.

- Ask a 4-H member to develop a display.
- Promote a 4-H member to a higher level of responsibility.
- Make sure that each 4-H member is a “good fit” for their leadership role.

4. Opportunity to Value and Practice Service

Service is a way for youth to gain exposure to the larger community and the world. It is necessary for youth to actively practice and treasure service. Many times this experience enables young people to recognize the difference that they can make for others and their communities.

- Recognize and share innovative suggestions or ideas for community service projects.
- Recognize community service activities.
- Recognize the impact of the number of hours contributed to 4-H.
- Ask a 4-H member to speak on behalf of 4-H to an outside agency.
- Send thank-you notes to the 4-H member’s employer acknowledging the employee’s contribution.
- Ask 4-H members to work with younger members.
- Plant a tree or flower bed in a 4-H member’s name.
- Contribute to a charity in a 4-H member’s name.
- Encourage 4-H members to provide leadership in their community.

5. Opportunity for Self-Determination

Ohio youth must believe that they can have an impact over life’s events rather than life’s events having control of their lives. Youth programs must foster the personal sense of influence that youth have over their lives and provide opportunities to exercise this potential to become self-directing and autonomous adults for the future.

- Ask a 4-H member to conduct a program.
- Ask a 4-H member to mentor a new recruit.

- Bounce new ideas off of a 4-H member.
- Involve 4-H members in problem solving.
- Ask a 4-H member to suggest guest speakers to talk about career choices.
- Ask 4-H members to suggest field trips to explore different careers.

6. Welcoming Environment

Young people should not fear physical or emotional harm from learning environments, adults who work with them, or from other youth. Through extensive training and development opportunities, volunteers and staff are equipped with the tools to provide safe environments for youth to grow and develop in a positive way.

- Write a news article (or have a reporter write) for the local newspaper or county 4-H newsletter, highlighting a 4-H member's contribution or impact.
- Feature a 4-H member in a slide show.
- Make telephone calls, send e-mail, or send handwritten notes.
- Send holiday greeting cards, get-well cards, and thank-you notes.
- Organize a card shower for a 4-H member.
- Send peppermint candies with the message "You're worth a mint!"
- Send thank-you notes to parent.
- Give complimentary gift certificates.
- Send balloons.
- Send cookies.
- Give calendars, notepads, pens, or pencils.
- Provide favors at meetings or events.
- Serve refreshments.
- Plan a theme party (toga, costume, western, birthday bashes, etc.)
- Host a banquet, luncheon, dessert, tea, or reception in the 4-H member's honor.

- Plan an outing (picnic, theater, ball game, family day, pool party, etc.)
- Stage a potluck dinner in a 4-H member's honor.
- Organize a holiday open house.
- Provide reserved seating at any event.
- Provide orientation for each 4-H ceremony, activity, or duty.
- Provide certificates, plaques, pins, etc.
- Have a "4-H member of the month" award.
- Nominate 4-H members for awards.
- Recognize 4-H members for contributions and accomplishments.
- Recognize years of 4-H membership.
- Greet each 4-H member with enthusiasm and appreciation.
- Ask the 4-H member to direct a membership recruitment campaign.
- Have a program participant share a success story about the 4-H member.

7. To Be an Active Participant in the Future

Providing youth with the opportunity to see themselves in the future gives them the hope and optimism to shape their life choices accordingly. We can teach all the facts and figures we want in various subject matter areas, but if we don't link them to their future, those facts and figures may go unused. Youth programs must be committed to positive youth development that makes a connection from today's activities to tomorrow's success.

- Utilize a 4-H member suggestion box.
- Utilize a 4-H member as a consultant.
- Bounce new ideas off of a 4-H member.
- Encourage a 4-H member to apply for awards and leadership opportunities such as Camp Counselor, Junior Fair Board, Citizen Washington, State Ambassadors, etc.
- Ask a 4-H member to help plan events.

8. Engagement in Learning

Youth programs provide for self-reflection that enables young people to connect what they are learning today with what they have learned in the past to apply in the future. While youth are learning about specific subject matter, being engaged in hands-on learning provides opportunities to develop important life skills (i.e., problem solving, decision making, teamwork, communication, etc.). These life skills are essential to both careers and avocations.

- Ask a 4-H member for their input.
- Ask a 4-H member to serve in a leadership role.
- Ask a 4-H member to coordinate an activity.
- Invite 4-H members to committee meetings. Encourage participation.
- Send a 4-H member to a conference.
- Ask the 4-H member to present a report or workshop on some aspect of the conference.
- Reimburse gas money for club activities.

- Discuss activities with 4-H members after participation.
- Ask a 4-H member to assist with workshop preparation.
- Recognize the impact of the number of hours contributed to 4-H.
- Utilize a 4-H member as a consultant.
- Send a note of congratulations for personal and professional achievements.
- Print business cards for volunteers working on a special assignment.
- Ask a 4-H member to co-present a workshop.

References

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