



# Virginia 4-H Family Handbook

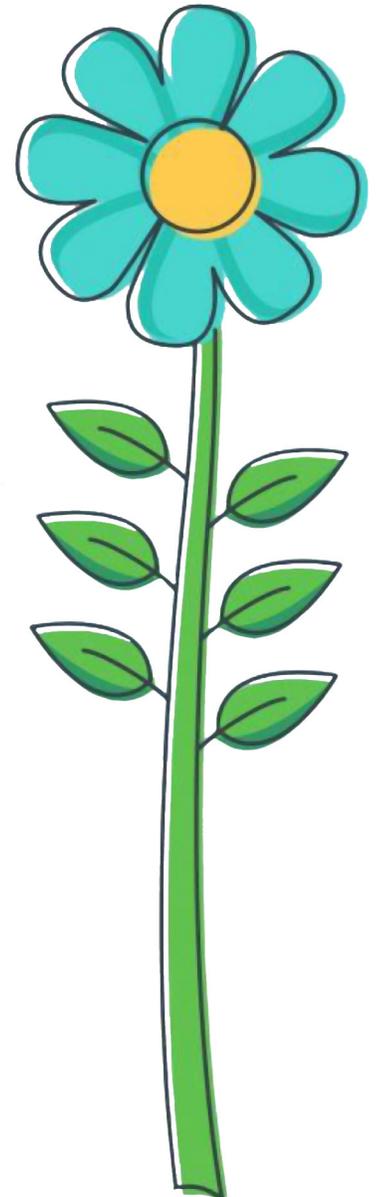


# Virginia 4-H Family Handbook

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# Introductory Letter

*[Note to Extension agents: Please customize this template to replace the bracketed, highlighted text to provide appropriate local information, then delete this note and print this letter on official letterhead before sending it to 4-H families.]*

[insert month, day and year]

Dear [insert name of parents or guardians]:

Welcome to 4-H! You have just enrolled in one of the greatest youth development programs in the nation. With nearly 6 million youth involved nationwide, 4-H is the largest youth educational program in the country. The Virginia 4-H Family Handbook gives you an overview of the Virginia 4-H Youth Development Program and the opportunities and resources it provides to help your family have an incredible 4-H experience.

The handbook provides only an introductory snapshot. Your best way to stay informed is to visit our local website at [insert website address] and read the [insert newsletter name].

4-H program opportunities are vast, and when you are new, these opportunities can seem a little overwhelming. It's important to keep in mind that your family's 4-H experience can be tailor-made to fit your goals, schedule, and interests. That is one reason 4-H is such a great program for Virginia families. You can learn and grow together by being involved as a whole family.

Keep in mind that our 4-H club leaders are volunteers. They will also be a great help along your family's 4-H journey, but they also want your help. Our clubs will be able to accomplish so much more if parents and guardians share some of the responsibilities with our club leaders. Ask your club leader what you can do to support your child's club. If we all take part, it makes everyone's involvement more manageable and fun!

As the 4-H Extension agent of [insert local unit name], I provide leadership to our local 4-H program. Do not hesitate to reach out if you need help along your 4-H journey. The local Extension office is located at [insert physical address]. Office hours are [insert hours] Monday through Friday.

Again, welcome to the wonderful world of 4-H!

Sincerely,

[Insert signature]

[Insert title]

# Welcome to Virginia 4-H!

4-H believes in the power of young people. Through 4-H, trained professionals and caring adult volunteers deliver programming that empowers youth to learn by doing. Experiential learning directed toward a child's specific passions and areas of interest not only grows their knowledge in particular subject areas, but also builds positive life skills, such as leadership, responsibility, critical thinking, and decision making. 4-H has more than 100 years of experience empowering youth to develop skills so that they can personally thrive and effectively contribute to their communities. Some of the ways 4-H benefits young people are highlighted in figure 1.

Virginia 4-H is conducted by Virginia Cooperative Extension, a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. The Virginia 4-H program is backed by a network of 100 public universities and delivered locally through Virginia Cooperative Extension's 107 local offices, six 4-H educational centers, and two land-grant universities — Virginia Tech and Virginia State University.

## 4-H'ers are...



Figure 1. Ways 4-H benefits young people.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Who Can Join Virginia 4-H?

Virginia 4-H is open to all, regardless of color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law. Virginia 4-H offers programs for youth ages 5-19, and adults can support 4-H programs as volunteers.

### How Does 4-H Approach Youth Development?

In 4-H, we pride ourselves on being rooted in a strong foundation of quality programming that leads to long-term outcomes (fig. 2). Our Positive Youth Development, or PYD, approach focuses on the intentional promotion of social, emotional, and cognitive learning that leads to positive behaviors and developmental outcomes among young people.

### What Kinds of Program Does 4-H Offer?

**STEM** – 4-H STEM programs provide 4-H youth the opportunity to learn about science, technology, engineering, and math through fun hands-on activities and projects.

**Agriculture** – 4-H agriculture programs provide youth with agricultural knowledge by participating in activities such as raising animals and growing crops and gardens.

**Healthy Living** – 4-H healthy living programs help 4-H youth learn how to lead lives that balance physical, mental, and emotional health.

**Civic Engagement** – 4-H civic engagement programs empower young people to be well-informed citizens who are actively engaged in their communities and the world.

### How Much Time Do Members Need to Commit to 4-H?

Clubs generally start in September or October and meet year-round, with occasional breaks during the summer and holidays. Club meetings generally occur monthly, with additional special activities being scheduled throughout the year. Every 4-H'er enrolls in at least one project per year. Projects require a minimum of six hours of instruction time.

Many projects include more than six hours of instruction time, and most require that youth spend time on their project work outside of club meetings to be successful. More information about projects can be found in the Clubs, Projects, and More section of this handbook.

### Are There Fees?

**Enrollment** – It is free to join 4-H. Your local 4-H program is funded by state, local, and federal taxes; grants; and donations. If you would like to make a donation to Virginia 4-H or your local 4-H program, please visit the Virginia 4-H Mobile Giving Platform ([www.give.vt.edu/4h](http://www.give.vt.edu/4h)).

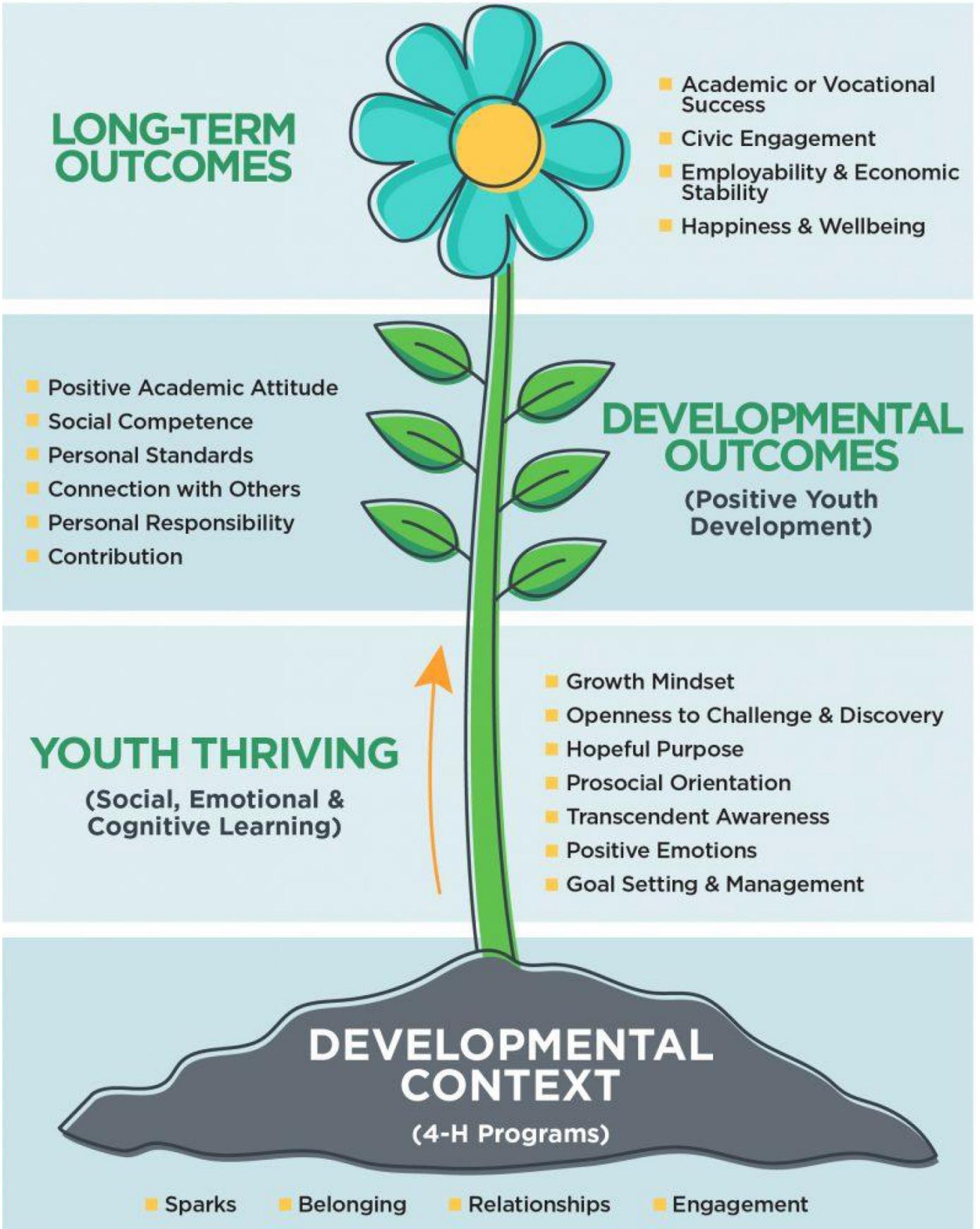


Figure 2. 4-H thriving model.

Projects – Most of the time, each family is responsible for acquiring the materials needed to carry out project activities. Some clubs may charge dues to cover project costs, and some clubs will raise funds to help lower costs for everyone involved. We recommend that families review these costs with club and project leaders before signing up for a particular project. If your family would not be able to participate in a 4-H project due to a financial hardship, contact your local Extension office (<https://ext.vt.edu/offices.html>) about needs-based scholarships, which are often available.

Events – Many county- and city-level events are free. When fees are charged, each participant is responsible for paying their event fees. Some counties, cities, and clubs hold fundraisers to help members cover the costs of these events, and some also offer needs-based scholarships.

## What Ages Does 4-H Serve?

Depending on their ages, children are eligible for membership in one of following levels. The levels are based on the age of the child as of Sept. 30 of the current 4-H year. Our 4-H year is Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.

**Cloverbuds (5-8 years old)** – Since Cloverbuds are still developing their interests, Cloverbud programs generally engage participants in a variety of noncompetitive activities. For safety reasons, Cloverbuds may not participate in 4-H activities and events in which they are expected to control, solely care for, or otherwise manage large animals or any other animal which presents a safety risk. Large animals are defined as cattle, llamas, sheep, swine, horses, and ratites (such as ostriches, rheas, cassowaries, and emus). Cloverbuds are also not permitted to participate in shooting education programs.

**Juniors (9-11 years old)** – Junior members are eligible to participate in most 4-H projects and many competitions. In clubs, junior 4-H'ers are encouraged to take on introductory leadership roles, such as serving on committees or as recreation leaders.

**Intermediates (12-13 years old)** – Intermediate members may participate in all 4-H projects and are encouraged to serve in progressively more challenging leadership roles.

**Seniors (14-19 years old)** – Eligibility for 4-H membership terminates on Dec. 31 of the year the member has their 19th birthday. Senior members may enroll in all 4-H projects and are encouraged to serve in progressively more challenging leadership roles. Senior members are also encouraged to serve in teen leader roles that allow them to teach and mentor younger members.

## How Can a Person Join 4-H?

Contact your local Extension office (<https://ext.vt.edu/offices.html>) in the Extension unit (county or city) where your family resides to see what kinds of 4-H programs are available locally. Youth will normally enroll for all their 4-H work in the unit in which they reside. However, there may be a situation where youth may need to be enrolled in the 4-H program outside their unit of residence. They are restricted from enrolling in the same project or activity in more than one Extension unit in the same year.

There are many legitimate reasons a 4-H member might want to enroll in 4-H outside of their unit of residence.

These are some of the more common reasons:

- The 4-H member attends school in a different unit and would like to participate in 4-H with youth they already know.
- The 4-H member lives closer to a club in a different unit, so it is more convenient.
- One of the member's parents or both work in a different unit, so it is easier for them to bring the member to meetings in the other unit.

Once you have found a club or program that is a good fit for your family, you can enroll at 4-H Online (<https://v2.4honline.com/#/user/sign-in>).

When enrolling a member (or re-enrolling at the beginning of a new 4-H year), all families will need to provide health history information for the 4-H member. This information is held confidentially and used only in the event of an emergency or if someone needs medical treatment for any reason. Health information is never used to keep youth from enrolling in 4-H. If you have any questions or concerns about providing this information, please contact the local Extension office to speak with the agent directly.

## Open to All

4-H is a program open to all youth, and we strive to provide safe and inclusive environments where everyone can learn. If your child needs accommodations to help them participate as a 4-H member, please contact the local Extension office. The Extension agent can talk with you about the various opportunities available and how 4-H can best help your child succeed.

## Clubs, Projects, and More

In Virginia, there are different types of 4-H clubs, but each has the same core elements. The objectives, program structure, and settings differ based on the needs and interests of youth and families. Some 4-H clubs have separate club and project meetings. In others, the project work occurs at the club meeting. Some clubs meet after school for shorter periods of time and may not elect officers.

For more information about the types of clubs offered in your area, contact your [local Extension office](#).

### Club Meetings

Virginia 4-H clubs operate under an established constitution and bylaws or operating procedures. Clubs either elect youth officers or have youth leaders who provide club leadership. In partnership with adults, members develop and implement their club's annual educational plan. The club leader or other adult volunteer supports the members in these activities and guides them as they acquire leadership skills. Club meetings also provide an opportunity for members and their parents or guardians to share experiences and interests.

### Projects

4-H projects are research-based learning modules that allow a 4-H member to work hands-on to gather in-depth knowledge about a particular topic. Projects are often done individually, but sometimes clubs may work on a project together. Projects also allow 4-H'ers to reflect on what they have experienced and, oftentimes, to apply their knowledge to real-world situations. They also help 4-H'ers learn new things, including such life skills as responsibility, teamwork, and communication.

Projects come in all "shapes and sizes" and are developed to target specific ages and stages of development. Projects can involve almost any subject that interests young people. Goats, horses, dog training, robotics, gardening, and archery are just a few.

Each club offers different projects depending on the needs and interests of youth and availability of caring adults to support the project. Completed projects may be exhibited at local fairs, Virginia 4-H events, or competitions. They are evaluated, and awards are given for quality work.

If members are interested in a project that is not available in their county, they may work with county staff to set up an independent project or participate with a neighboring unit that offers the desired project.

## Project Record Books

Project record books help young people track their activities, events, profits and losses, skill development, learning experiences, and much more. Record books also provide an opportunity to recognize achievements in project work. Virginia 4-H project record books can be found here: [Publications and Educational Resources](#).

## Presentations

Presentations help 4-H'ers share what they have learned and hone their public speaking and communication skills. Presentations may be done in clubs and local, district, and state competitions.

## Business Meetings

Business meetings give 4-H'ers an opportunity to participate in a small democracy as they work together to make decisions about club activities. Members may discuss and vote on activities such as community service projects, club T-shirt designs, and fundraising opportunities. Members who participate in business meetings learn how to express themselves in a group, listen to the views of others, come to a decision through parliamentary procedure, and abide by majority rule.

While adults can provide guidance and help youth think through potential consequences of decisions, only Virginia 4-H members vote on matters brought before the club during the business meeting. Business meetings typically last about 15 to 20 minutes and occur before a club learning activity. A typical business meeting agenda is as follows:

1. Call to Order.
2. Pledge of Allegiance and 4-H Pledge.
3. Roll Call and Minutes of the Previous Meeting.
4. Treasurer's Report.
5. Committee Reports.
6. Old Business.
7. New Business.
8. Adjournment.

## Club Officer Positions

4-H'ers may be given the opportunity to hold officer positions. This teaches responsibility, leadership, and civic engagement. Officers are given specific tasks to help the

club run smoothly. Here are examples of common club officer positions and their duties:

- The **president** presides over the business meeting and appoints committees.
- The **vice president** drafts program plans.
- The **secretary** keeps minutes and attendance records.
- The **treasurer** reports on club deposits, spending, and the club account balance.
- The **recreation leader** leads team-building games for the club.
- The **historian** creates a club scrapbook or display to help promote the club in the community.

## 4-H Volunteer Roles

The 4-H program is served by adult volunteers at all levels. These volunteers provide guidance, support, and supervision to youth members and help ensure that 4-H remains a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. Volunteers working with youth are screened and trained before serving. Adults who provide direct supervision to 4-H youth programs, handle 4-H club funds, or transport youth must pass a criminal background check before serving as 4-H volunteers. All adult volunteers abide by the [Standards of Behavior for Virginia 4-H Volunteers](#).

## A Club Leader's Responsibilities

Club leaders are Virginia 4-H adult volunteers. Sometimes, they are parents or guardians of members. They serve 4-H members, the 4-H club, and the 4-H program in the following ways:

- Coordinating the team that provides support, guidance, and direction to 4-H members and the club.
- Serving as the club's primary contact person with the local 4-H Youth Development Program staff.
- Promoting the 4-H club, as well as its mission and programs, to the community.
- Ensuring compliance with and adherence to Virginia 4-H policies and procedures and the core values of parents, adult volunteers, and members.
- Providing a safe environment that fosters positive youth development.

## A Project Leader's Responsibilities

As with club leaders, project leaders are Virginia 4-H adult volunteers who are sometimes parents or guardians of members. Project leaders have these responsibilities:

- Helping members plan and organize the project work based on the experiential learning model.
- Helping members organize and conduct project meetings.
- Obtaining resources for project work.
- Encouraging members to set specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based goals.
- Keeping members informed about project-related events they are eligible to participate in and giving members ideas on how to prepare for these events.
- Recognizing project progress and encouraging continued improvement.
- Helping members reflect on their project progress at the end of the year.
- Talking with parents of members who need extra help or who have problems working with other members.
- Participating in meetings and keeping the club leader informed of their own group's work and progress.
- Engaging teens in teaching components of project work.

## The Role of a 4-H Club Member

During their 4-H careers, Virginia 4-H members work as individuals and as a part of teams. Their level of participation is completely up to them and their families. Opportunities are offered at the club, county or city, district, state, and national levels. Members must abide by the Virginia 4-H Code of Conduct (<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/4-H/4H-164/4H-164.html>).

Across Virginia 4-H clubs and at the local, district, and state level, 4-H'ers have opportunities to do the following:

- Participate in 4-H projects in groups and individually.
- Complete and be recognized for project record books.
- Take part in club business meetings and educational programs.
- Serve as club officers and on club committees.

- Provide community service through activities organized at the club and county level.
- Compete in local, district, state, and national 4-H events.
- Take part in local, district, state, and national educational events.

Ambassadors, and the Virginia 4-H Healthy Living Ambassadors — also offer opportunities to represent the state.

National 4-H Council sponsors the National 4-H Youth in Action Awards to recognize members who have gone above and beyond to demonstrate exemplary leadership skills. One member is recognized in each of the pillar areas: agriculture, civic engagement, healthy living, and STEM. Virginia 4-H also has a parallel Youth in Action Award program to recognize four exemplary leaders at the state level who are then provided scholarships to attend State 4-H Congress, mini grants to help complete local projects, and opportunities to speak on behalf of Virginia 4-H in their respective pillar areas.

Many of these leadership opportunities are open only to senior level 4-H'ers, but younger members are also given opportunities to develop these skills. Younger 4-H'ers can participate in many competitions related to project work. This often involves demonstrations, which help youth develop and refine the public speaking skills necessary for future leaders. In addition, youth are encouraged to serve as club officers and committee chairs and in other roles that help prepare them for senior-level leadership opportunities. Some events, such as 4-H Day at the Capitol, are open to 4-H'ers of all ages; this enables senior 4-H members in leadership positions to serve as role models for younger members who will soon be eligible to fill these same positions.

## 4-H PLEDGE

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.



Figure 3. 4-H pledge

## Youth Leadership Opportunities

As youth grow and continue in 4-H, they have opportunities to develop leadership skills and abilities beyond the local club level. To allow older youth to serve as leaders for their peers, Virginia 4-H offers programs like the Virginia 4-H State Cabinet and the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. Some project areas — such as the Virginia 4-H Horse Ambassadors, Virginia 4-H Shooting Education

Table 1 lists state and national opportunities in which 4-H youth may participate. Some of these events are open only to senior 4-H members, and the list is not meant to be exhaustive. However, this should give families an idea of the kinds of opportunities available to them. Be sure to check with your Extension agent to find out about events available to your 4-H member.

Table 1. State and national 4-H events.

Event	Date	Description
4-H Day at the Capitol	Jan/Feb	4-H'ers from around Virginia travel with Units or districts to Richmond to meet legislators and learn about the workings of state government, along with other civic engagement educational opportunities.
Block & Bridle Contest Week-end	February	The VA Tech Block and Bridle Club hosts Equine Educational Contests (Hippology and Horse Judging) and Livestock Educational Contests (Livestock and Stockman's) for 4-H and FFA youth from across Virginia and surrounding states. Participants compete for awards in these events.
Dairy Quiz Bowl	February/ March	Dairy Quiz Bowl is a team event designed to test participants' knowledge of the dairy industry from farm to table. Questions in the contest are taken from the Virginia 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl Materials, which are posted online at <a href="https://www.youth.dasc.vt.edu/quiz-bowl.html">https://www.youth.dasc.vt.edu/quiz-bowl.html</a> . There are junior and senior divisions in the contest which consists of a written test, team questions, and individual toss-up questions. An all-star state team is selected to represent Virginia in the national contest held at the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Kentucky, in November.

**Table 1. State and national 4-H events cont.**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
State Meats Judging Contest	March	The State 4-H/FFA Meats Evaluation Contest is held on campus at Virginia Tech and serves as the qualifier for the National 4-H Contest held in Kansas in late October. Youth complete a knowledge quiz, evaluate classes of wholesale and retail products, and seniors give one set of oral reasons. Team and individual awards are given.
Spring Air Shooting Education Weekend	March	State BB Championship which selects teams to compete in the Nation BB championship. Other events include Air Rifle 3P, Air Rifle silhouettes, Air Pistol PPP, Air Pistol silhouettes, and archery.
State 4-H Livestock Skillathon	March / April	The State 4-H Skillathon Contest is held for junior and senior 4-H youth from across the Commonwealth. Participants identify equipment, breeds, feeds, retail meat cuts, and evaluate classes of livestock, hay and meats. They complete a knowledge quiz and work with teammates to complete team problems. The highest placing senior team represents Virginia at the National 4-H Skillathon in Louisville, KY, in mid-November.
National 4-H Conference	March/ April	Senior 4-H members from around the nation come together in Washington, D.C., to learn about real issues from government agencies. Youth then work in teams to develop recommendations for solutions and present these to agency officials.
Equismartz Competition	April	The state-level contest for the six equine educational contests held collectively over one weekend, is known as EquiSmartz. This is the Qualifier for the Regional and National contests for seniors. Juniors and seniors compete in Hippology, Horse Bowl, Horse Judging, Individual Presentation, Team Presentation, and Public Speaking.
Dairy Skillathon	April	The State Youth Dairy Skillathon is open to 4-H and FFA members. It is a team event designed to test skills in dairy management. Classes may include identification of feeds, equipment, or products; anatomy; dairy breeds; dairy management; farm safety; and judging of live animal classes.
Virginia Junior Beef Roundup	April	The Virginia Junior Beef Roundup, held at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds, is a beef cattle show for 4-H and FFA youth that includes classes for steers, commercial and registered breeding heifers, and registered bred & owned bulls. Youth compete in showmanship classes, fitting contests, the Beef Challenge/Build a Better Burger Contest, and other cattle related competitions.
Virginia State Poultry Judging Contest	April	The Virginia State 4-H and FFA Poultry Evaluation Contest is held in conjunction with the VA Youth Poultry Convention at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds. Youth contestants evaluate live birds, grade meat products and eggs, and identify poultry products. The highest placing 4-H team represents VA at the National 4-H Poultry Evaluation Contest in Louisville, KY, in mid-November.
Dairy Skillathon	April	The State Youth Dairy Skillathon is open to 4-H and FFA members. It is a team event designed to test skills in dairy management. Classes may include identification of feeds, equipment, or products; anatomy; dairy breeds; dairy management; farm safety; and judging of live animal classes.
June Dairy Month Poster Contest	April to June	The June Dairy Month 4-H Poster Contest provides youth with the opportunity to learn more about milk and milk products and their importance to human health. Youth use their creativity and artistic abilities to create a poster illustrating a specified theme. Posters are judged at the unit level in one of three divisions – junior, intermediate, or senior. The top three posters in each age division at the unit level may compete for state awards.

**Table 1. State and national 4-H events cont.**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
State Livestock Judging Contest	June	Junior and senior contestants evaluate classes of sheep, meat goats, swine, and beef cattle in addition to presenting oral reasons to defend their choices and decisions. The top 20 senior individuals earn the opportunity to secure a spot on the Virginia 4-H All Star Team and represent VA at the National 4-H Livestock Judging Contest in Louisville, KY.
State 4-H Congress	June	Virginia 4-H's flagship statewide event for youth ages 14-18. Held on the campus of Virginia Tech, youth participate in workshops, social activities, and service learning to develop leadership and skills.
Project Demonstration Contests	June	Youth are able to demonstrate proficiency in good project work, and develop presentation skills at the Unit and/or regional level. State level contests are then held normally in conjunction with State 4-H Congress.
State 4-H Intermediate Congress	July	The mission of 4-H Intermediate Congress is to provide non-competitive educational experiences to youth ages 11-13 and the adults who work with them, helping them to develop life skills, and leadership abilities to become contributing citizens in their communities.
Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF)	July	An educational conference for youth ages 15-19. Held around Washington, D.C., CWF gives youth the opportunity to develop and explore civic engagement skills used in becoming good leaders.
State Dairy Cattle Judging Contest	July / August	The State 4-H Dairy Judging Contest is conducted as part of the State 4-H/FFA Dairy Youth Field Day. The contest involves judging dairy heifer or cow classes, each consisting of four animals. Youth present oral reasons to defend their placings on select classes. Youth compete in a junior or senior division on teams of 3 or 4 and/or individually. All-star state dairy judging teams are selected to represent Virginia in regional or national contests. The A team competes at the Pennsylvania All American Dairy Show in Harrisburg and in the National 4-H Dairy Cattle Judging Contest at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin. The B team competes at the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Kentucky.
Northern District Shoot	August	Competitive events in air pistol, air rifle, archery, BB Gun, muzzleloading, shotgun, and smallbore rifle. Serves as the preparatory event before competitors attend the State Shoot.
State 4-H Horse Show	September	The annual Championship show for youth, ages 9-18, who have qualified to attend by participating at a District level show or clinic, and have kept records on their declared animal, amongst other requirements. Disciplines include Hunters, Jumpers, Western, Dressage, Minis, Gaited, Gymkhana, Ranch, and Driving. Educational contests invite all 4-H members, including horseless horse project youth, to participate. This is the Qualifying show for the Regional Championship Show.
State Fair Youth Dairy Cattle Show	September	The State Fair Youth Dairy Cattle Show is open to 4-H and FFA members. Dairy cattle must be personally owned and registered individually by the exhibitor. They must also be shown by the exhibitor. Commercial (non-registered) classes are also available. Youth for the Quality Care of Animals (YQCA) certification is required for participation. Youth may compete in a fitting and showmanship contest in addition to type classes.

**Table 1. State and national 4-H events cont.**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
State Fair Junior Dairyemen's Contest	September	The State Fair Junior Dairyemen's Contest is an educational contest for youth who are interested in improving and testing their knowledge of the dairy industry. The contest consists of a written test; identification of dairy equipment, cattle equipment, feeds, and dairy foods; answering questions about dairy records (DHIA); and judging two live animal classes. Youth compete in a junior or senior division on teams of 3 or 4 and/or individually.
State 4-H Shoot	September	Competitive events in air pistol, air rifle, archery, BB Gun, muzzleloading, shotgun, smallbore pistol and smallbore rifle. Serves as the selection process for multiple disciplines to determine who represents Virginia at the 4-H National Shooting Sports Championship.
State Fair of Virginia	Sept/Oct	The State Fair of Virginia provides a variety of agriculture-related competitions and activities in which 4-H members may participate including: Agriscience, horticulture, livestock, small engine, tractor, hippology, and others.
National 4-H Congress	November	The premiere educational and recognition event for senior 4-H members, National Congress provides participants an exciting opportunity to explore careers, engage in a variety of quality learning experiences, and have great fun by getting to know other 4-H members from across the country. This event is held annually in Atlanta, Georgia, immediately following Thanksgiving.

## How Young People Learn

4-H programs are grounded in the belief that youth learn best by actively participating. In fact, the national slogan of 4-H is “learn by doing.” This approach differs from, and yet complements, the more traditional education that young people receive in their regular classrooms. In 4-H, youth complete hands-on projects in a positive environment, receiving guidance from adult mentors and being encouraged to take on proactive leadership roles. Kids can concentrate on a single program area, such as agriculture, civic engagement, healthy living, or STEM, or they can try a variety of programs throughout their 4-H experience.

Regardless of the focus area, all 4-H programs include mentoring and career readiness as core elements. 4-H is also adaptable to many different learning styles, so it is highly likely that we have a project area that fits just about any youth learner's needs.

## Opportunities Beyond the Club

While most members spend the majority of their time in 4-H with their local 4-H club, they also have many opportunities to experience 4-H beyond the club level. They can take part not only in the leadership opportunities mentioned

previously but also in state and national opportunities such as these:

### Camps and Events

4-H camps and events are offered at local, district, state, and national levels. They may last for one or more days. All incorporate educational components focused on one or more of our program areas: agriculture, civic engagement, healthy living, and STEM. Virginia 4-H is proud of its long history and nationally recognized leadership in 4-H camping.

### Contests

City, county, district, state, and national contests encourage youth to expand on their 4-H project work and network with other 4-H'ers outside of their clubs. Contests help youth learn cooperative and competitive skills. Among the many contests are livestock shows, horse shows, dog shows, shooting contests, and Food Challenge competitions.

### Fairs

Fairs provide opportunities for members to exhibit the best of their project work from the past year to show how their skills have grown. Fairs also allow community members to learn what Virginia 4-H activities are taking place in

their area. Most fairs are not run directly by Virginia 4-H. Each fair is governed by a set of rules that 4-H'ers should carefully review before entering. Entering projects in county, district, and state fairs is the responsibility of the Virginia 4-H members. They should contact their project leaders and Extension staff members to obtain and get help completing the necessary forms and obtaining required signatures. Members are responsible for turning in their entries on time and following the fair rules and the Virginia 4-H Code of Conduct.

## Incentives and Recognition

Virginia 4-H promotes participation in a variety of competitions that empower youth to develop life skills. Participants are rewarded with ribbons, pins, and certificates. Cloverbud members (5-8 years old) should only receive recognition for participation. Youth development research has shown that competition does not have positive effects on this age group.

In Virginia 4-H, competitions are evaluated in one of two ways. In the American system, competitors are evaluated against one another and awarded first, second, or third place. In the Danish system, competitors are evaluated against a universal standard and their score earns them blue, red, or white ribbons. In some scenarios, the top-scoring competitor with a blue award also receives a purple ribbon. The largest difference between the two systems is that there is no maximum or minimum number of blue, red, or white awards that can be awarded in the Danish system — every competitor has an equal chance at the highest award.

Youth age 15 – 19 are eligible to apply for membership in the Virginia 4-H All Stars by using the points-based nomination form found at this site: <https://ext.vt.edu/4h-youth/all-stars.html>. While it is an honor to be chosen as an All Star, the real advantage of membership is in serving the 4-H program and the community in which you live. Virginia Chapter of 4-H All Stars is a tremendous source of both teen and adult leaders who are actively involved in expanding and enhancing the 4-H program throughout the commonwealth.

High school seniors may be eligible for scholarships provided through the Virginia 4-H program to support their higher education goals. Check with your local Extension office to learn what is available.

## Enhancing Your Experience

We want every Virginia 4-H member to feel welcome and successful in the program. Here are some tips to help you navigate your way through Virginia 4-H.

## Supporting Successful Club Involvement

Virginia 4-H parents and guardians can contribute to their child's club success by doing some of the following:

- Getting to know the club leader(s) and project leaders.
- Attending local club and project meetings with their children whenever possible.
- Asking for copies of the club's bylaws and constitution or operating procedures and yearly calendar of events.
- Encouraging children to complete project work and to meet deadlines.
- Bookmarking and occasionally visiting county or city Extension program websites.

## Supporting Your Child's Club

Adults can support their children's 4-H clubs by serving as project leaders who share their activities or hobbies with members or by assuming specific club responsibilities, such as helping with member registration, working with youth committees to plan activities, or helping club officers with their responsibilities.

Adults helping in any role should enroll as Virginia 4-H adult volunteers. Adult volunteers must complete an application, background check, and training and are covered under Virginia Tech's general liability insurance. To learn more about becoming a Virginia 4-H adult volunteer, speak to your club leader or the county Extension office.

Other ways to support 4-H clubs include:

- Contributing funds.
- Donating materials or skills.
- Offering in-kind support, such as meeting space.

Virginia 4-H does not receive any programming dollars and relies solely on grants, fundraising, and donations. If you know an individual, business, or organization that would be interested in financially supporting the Virginia 4-H program in your location, refer them to your local Extension office for more information.

## Ensuring Satisfaction with Virginia 4-H

This handbook is designed to let you know what to expect from 4-H club and project experiences. If your expectations

are not met, please contact your local Extension office to speak with the 4-H Extension agent or program assistant. If they cannot adequately address the issue, ask your 4-H program representative to connect you with the right person to resolve your issue.

Please keep in mind that club leaders are volunteers and have limited time and resources. We do our best to ensure that programs are of high quality and open to all, but we are often working with limited resources.

## Contacting Your Local Office

Find contact information your local Extension office through the website <https://ext.vt.edu/offices.html>.

*[Note to Extension agents: Please customize the following bracketed, highlighted material by adding appropriate local program information, then delete this note.]*

### Local Office Information

[Name]

[Title]

[Address]

[Phone Number]

[E-Mail Address]

### Internet Resources

Local Website: [<http://www....>]

Event Calendar: [<http://www...>]

Social Media: [Platform name: web address; platform name: web address; platform name: web address]

## Local Club Directory

[Club Name]

Leader: [Name and Contact Information]

Meetings: [Day of the Week, Time, and Place]

Focus: [Description]

[Club Name]

Leader: [Name and Contact Information]

Meetings: [Day of the Week, Time, and Place]

Focus: [Description]

[Club Name]

Leader: [Name and Contact Information]

Meetings: [Day of the Week, Time, and Place]

Focus: [Description]

[Club Name]

Leader: [Name and Contact Information]

Meetings: [Day of the Week, Time, and Place]

Focus: [Description]

Enroll at <https://v2.4honline.com>

Access project record books at [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu:record-book](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html/pubs_ext_vt_edu:record-book)

Visit our website: [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)

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