

Opportunities and Resources for 4-H Adult Volunteers



There are many opportunities and resources available to 4-H volunteers who want to learn more about 4-H, make new friends, and develop additional skills. As you feel comfortable with one aspect of your volunteer role, you will want to challenge yourself to take on new experiences. Watch for announcements in your county 4-H newsletter, and find more information on state and county 4-H websites.

At the Local Level

New volunteer training. If you have not already attended a “new volunteer training,” ask your local Extension office when the next one will be held. This training is required for all volunteers and covers topics including 4-H philosophy and objectives, planning club meetings, risk management, enrollment guidelines, and available resources.

Four volunteer e-learning modules are available on the volunteer section of the Oregon 4-H website (<http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/elearning-course>): *About 4-H*, *Positive Youth Development*, *Getting Started in 4-H*, and *Leadership and Teaching*. Ask your local Extension office if these e-learning modules are part of the required training.

Project leader meetings. One of the best ways to become familiar with 4-H is to attend leader meetings. Some counties hold separate project leader meetings (e.g., livestock leaders, expressive arts leaders, etc.). Some counties hold general leader meetings, and then leaders break into project areas for further discussion. During these meetings, leaders plan for annual clinics, workshops, and other project-specific county events.

You will find these meetings helpful and informative. Attending will help you keep up with county activities and alert you to upcoming deadlines. You can learn what other leaders are doing in their clubs and share your ideas and experiences.

County 4-H advisory committees. Many counties have an organized group of volunteers that meets regularly to discuss the county 4-H program and offer advice. These volunteers also support 4-H activities and raise funds. This group may be called a 4-H advisory committee, council, or association. Joining this group will help you understand the larger picture of county and state 4-H programs and give you an opportunity to be involved beyond a specific project area.

County events. Volunteers are the key to a successful 4-H program. Volunteers who take an active part in county events help the program succeed and often find they become more effective leaders while developing their own skills.

There are many volunteer opportunities throughout the 4-H year. Clerking for a county fair judge is an excellent way to learn more about a project area. Consider joining a planning committee. As you gain experience, you may want to organize an event or be a county fair superintendent.

At the State Level

State 4-H Volunteer Forum. This educational event is held every 1 to 2 years for adult volunteers and older members in leadership positions. The forum features workshops that focus on general leadership skill development and specific 4-H project areas. You will learn many new ideas. And as you become comfortable in your volunteer role, you can share your expertise and teach a workshop.

State committees. When you are familiar with 4-H, you can apply to be on one of the many state advisory committees. These include project committees, such as dog, natural sciences, and expressive arts; activity committees, such as 4-H Summer Conference and Activate Oregon; and administrative committees, such as the 4-H Leaders Association Executive Council and Oregon 4-H Foundation Board. Depending on the committee, you may review curriculum, give input on guidelines and resources, provide expertise in a particular area, evaluate programs, or help at events.

State 4-H Leaders Association. Members of the Oregon 4-H Leaders Association (1) promote and support the 4-H Youth Development Program, (2) support 4-H volunteer education, (3) serve as volunteer representatives on state 4-H advisory committees, and (4) serve as advocates for Oregon 4-H volunteers, faculty, and staff.

The Oregon 4-H Leaders Association Executive Council is composed of 4-H volunteers from across the state. This group has frequent teleconferences and meets in person twice a year. All volunteers are welcome to apply to serve on the Executive Council. Sixteen county volunteers each represent one of the six association districts. In addition to the district representatives, there are eight teen representatives and several at-large positions. Terms are 3 years, but teen representatives may serve just 1 year and renew annually to accommodate their changing schedules.

State Fair. State Fair offers many opportunities for volunteer involvement. Extensive help is needed during set-up, judging, and take-down times in the 4-H Exhibit Building. Volunteers can help plan, organize, and conduct many of the shows and events that take place during State Fair. Ask your local Extension office how to get involved.

Judges trainings. The State 4-H Office coordinates training seminars for judges; volunteers are often invited as well. These trainings will help you understand what judges look for as they evaluate exhibits. This, in turn, will help you better prepare members for competition. Local Extension offices receive announcements about upcoming trainings.

Chaperone. All state 4-H events require adult chaperones. These events are educational, inspiring and fun. Some are one-day events; others may last several days and require travel and overnight stays.

At the Regional, National, and International Levels

Western Regional 4-H Leaders Forum. This forum is held annually (usually in the spring) in one of 13 western states. It features informative seminars and meetings, tours, meals, and opportunities for 4-H volunteers to meet and exchange ideas. As you gain experience, you can sign up to teach a workshop and share your skills.

National 4-H Center. 4-H volunteers and their families can stay at the National 4-H Center near Washington, D.C. while visiting the nation's capital. Reservations must be made in advance. Contact your local Extension office for information.

4-H International Exchange Ambassador Programs. If you are interested in world citizenship and cultural immersion, you can apply to be a chaperone for an outbound exchange program. Partner countries usually include Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, and Norway. You can also host youth from another country.

Resources

County and state 4-H staff. The best resource for new volunteers is the local Extension office. The staff member in charge of the 4-H program is available to provide support, education, and help with problem solving. You can also contact the State 4-H Office. Don't hesitate to ask for ideas, information, and assistance.

Other leaders in the same project area. These people have a wealth of knowledge and can be excellent mentors. Get to know them by attending project leader meetings, advisory council meetings, and leaders forums. Talk with other volunteers at county and state 4-H activities.

Master volunteers. Other county Extension staff and trained Extension volunteers (e.g., Master Gardeners, Master Food Preservers, and Master Woodland Managers) are useful resources for your club.

Businesses, schools, and community organizations. These groups can provide guest speakers for club meetings, sponsor 4-H events, host field trips or tours, and partner with your club to conduct community service projects.

Publications. Many 4-H resources, educational materials, and Extension publications are available at your local Extension office, online, and through the National 4-H Supply Catalog.

Websites. The Oregon 4-H website (<http://oregon.4H.oregonstate.edu/>) contains information about state activities and links to all county websites. Familiarize yourself with these sites to keep up to date on upcoming activities, deadlines, and 4-H news.

The National 4-H website (<http://www.4-h.org/>) contains educational materials, volunteer resources, and links to other states' Extension websites.

Resource library. Volunteers can borrow a variety of learning resources from the State 4-H Office. These include teaching kits and DVDs for various project areas. Your local Extension office may also have resources available for check out.

Scholarships. Some counties have limited scholarship assistance available for volunteers who apply for local, state, regional, or national workshops. Contact your local Extension office for information.

Thanks for Volunteering

Being a 4-H volunteer can be challenging, but helping young people become successful, caring, productive citizens can also be one of the most rewarding experiences you'll ever have.

Useful Websites

- Oregon 4-H <http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/>
- State committees <http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/staff-advisory-councils-and-committees>
- National 4-H <http://www.4-h.org/>
- Exchange programs <http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/4h-world-citizenship-project-overview>

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