

Making the Most of 4-H Meetings: A Guide for Leaders



Your 4-H members want to be active. They want to learn. As a leader, you can help make meetings both enjoyable and educational. Each session should include activities that members feel are important to them. Involving the group in planning meetings is one way to stimulate continued interest.

A meeting is one method of carrying out a phase of the planned club program. In addition to being fun, it also helps members do the following:

- Learn by doing
- Develop confidence
- Form a cooperative attitude
- Gain experience in planning
- Know how to make decisions
- Obtain a sense of group pride
- Assume leadership responsibility
- Acquire new knowledge and skills

The patterns of your meetings are up to your group. There are no formulas or "secret recipes" for productive meetings, but experience tells us a few basic things are important.

Members of your group need to know they can organize a meeting in a way that seems best to them. If your group has officers, they should conduct the meeting. But they will need your guidance. Arrange time to meet with them in advance so they are prepared and can assume complete responsibility.

Members should manage the business meetings, not the leader.

As you and your group make plans for meetings, there are several things to consider.

The Meeting Place

- Select the best place available. Remember that light, air, and room arrangement are important.
- Explore possibilities and choose a location that will make it possible to fulfill the purpose of the meeting.
- Members' homes may work out well, but public and civic facilities may also be used.

Length of Meetings

- Should your meetings last two hours, three hours, or all day?
- The subject, ages of your members, and kinds of activities will help you determine the best pattern.
- Interest spans among boys and girls vary with age and the kind of subjects being studied.
- Older members are typically expected to focus on an activity longer than younger ones.
- Decide in advance when to start and when to finish, so parents can make transportation plans.

Frequency of Meetings

How often should meetings be held? There is no "right" answer to this question. Some leaders think that frequent meetings should be held, maybe weekly, as new groups are formed. They feel this helps to take advantage of initial interest. Many groups and clubs meet every other week. Once a month may be satisfactory for teens. You and your group can discuss possibilities and arrive at a decision.

Contents

Every meeting should include a variety of experiences. Some groups include activities for early arrivals, business, education, and recreation. These are a few choices. You and your group should work together in selecting what is to happen and how it will be done.

Activities for Early Arrivals

People feel the best and gain the most from their experience when they are at ease. Activities for early arrivals or a game at the beginning of the meeting helps the group develop a spirit of togetherness. Members can plan and lead games to help others have fun. Helping everyone feel welcome and accepted is vital to enthusiastic participation and response.

Business

Continuity from one meeting to another is important. Everyone in your group should be informed and reminded of plans and responsibilities. A business session may be held as soon as everyone is present. This can be formal, using parliamentary procedure, if your group has officers, or there can be an informal discussion to look ahead, make assignments, and make important decisions.

MSU Extension Publication 606 How to Conduct a 4-H Business Meeting provides information on how to conduct business meetings. Start with a brief review of ideas covered at the previous meeting before presenting new material. As you prepare to teach a subject, involve members in making "presentations." Members can give speeches, illustrated talks, or demonstrations as a part of the teaching-learning process.

Variety of Methods

Think about using a variety of methods in your meetings. Experts tell us that greater learning is achieved when people see, hear, and do something. Here are some ideas:

Listening

- A guest speaker
- A club member talking about an experience or project
- A recording of a speaker or music

Seeing

- Viewing written words or photos (such as reading and/or working with 4-H project manuals)
- Watching a live or recorded demonstration
- Exploring exhibits

Doing

- Taking field trips
- Role playing
- Learning by doing (real experiences such as making something, learning how to brush a live animal, etc.)

Remember, it isn't necessary to use every method at each meeting. The ages of your members, meeting facilities, and the time available will help determine ways to present information. Some people consider the educational section the heart of the meeting. Contact your local MSU Extension office for additional visual aids and materials.

Recreation

A change of pace is important. We all need a break in routine, and recreation or a social event will do wonders for morale. The age, sex, and size of your group will determine the kinds of activities. You will also need to consider the meeting place, time, and preferences of your group members. You can get directions for games, songs, dances, and drama from publications and books.

Measuring Progress

Everyone wants to know what 4-H members have learned and how much they have grown. Your group members will want to know how far they have moved toward their goals.

Arrange time at one of your meetings or at the end of a series to discuss the major successes of your program. You may also

identify areas where the group didn't meet expectations. This process will help develop an even more effective program next time.

You may stimulate discussion by asking the following:

- Did we reach all of our goals?
- What things were the most fun?
- Which activities could have been improved?
- Did everyone assume their responsibilities?
- Have we learned new skills and ways of doing things?
- Can we identify new areas to explore and study?

Looking Ahead

Anticipation is half the fun. If members of your group are to remain active, they need to look forward to the next meeting. Make sure they know the date, time, and place of the next meeting. Tell them the major topic, and remind individual members of specific responsibilities.

How do all of these items fit together? A guide or outline will help you and the members to know what is going to happen, how it will be done, and who is responsible for various assignments. Feel free to design your own format; as a suggestion, the guide on page 3 may be helpful. The items included under each heading are examples only. Try to complete details for at least two meetings in advance. Also, remind members of their assignments.

Successful Meetings

Meetings can be fun, and they can provide constructive experiences.

Meetings give youth an opportunity to make new friends, exchange ideas, increase knowledge, develop skills, enjoy recreational activities, and work together. Successful groups hold meetings that—

- are well planned. Members know what is going to happen.
- follow a schedule. Set definite dates and times.
- ensure the parents/guardians are also informed.
- occur often. Help maintain interest through frequency.
- take place in comfortable and convenient surroundings. Select the best location available.
- start and end on time. Consider the interest span of the group.
- provide fun and education, too.

Meeting Outline Guide

Date _____ Time _____ Place _____

Purpose _____

Portion of meeting	What	How	Who	Notes
Activity for early arrival				
Business				
Education				
Recreation				
Looking ahead				

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