



# LETTERS TO NEW LEADERS



## Letter 1: What is 4-H?

### Inside this issue:

How Does the 4-H Program Work?	2
What's More Important - the 4-H Project or the 4-H Member?	2
What is the 4-H Leader's Job?	2
Characteristics of a Good Leader	2
Eight Key Elements of Positive 4-H Youth Development	3
How Can I use the Information in this Letter?	4
Reference Materials	5

### Dear Leader,

Congratulations on being selected as a new 4H volunteer! You have embarked on an interesting, challenging, and rewarding experience. Because we know you have lots of questions about this new venture, we believe you'll find the following information helpful. This is the first of a set of seven letters that you will receive in the next few months, along with some supporting materials. We suggest that you keep them all together in a binder for easy reference. When you have all seven letters and reference materials, you will have a useful handbook for serving as a 4H Leader. *Letters to New Leaders: Contents* is enclosed with this letter. Put it in the front of your binder to help you locate information. This will also provide a preview of future letters. The next six letters include information on getting started with a 4-H project, planning and conducting 4-H club meetings, leadership and teaching techniques, working with youth and adults, 4-H activities, records and advancement programs, and professional development opportunities for 4-H Leaders.

You will notice that at the end of each letter is a section titled "*How I can use the information in this letter.*" This section allows you to write down your personal thoughts and ideas for later use with your 4-H project.

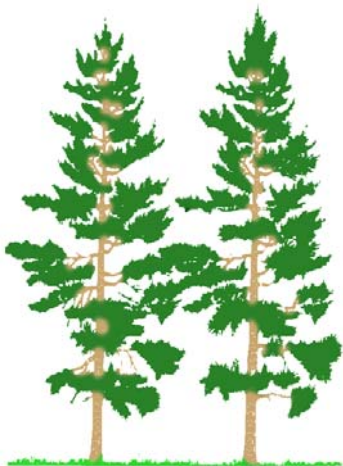
### What Is 4-H?

4-H is an experiential education program for youth ages 5 to 19. 4-H is a partnership between the federal, state and county branches of government and community volunteers such as your self. The "experiential learning" occurs when youth participate in an activity, look back to reflect on what they learned, draw conclusions or observations and relate the experience to other or future events in their lives. Through the learning

process, young people develop basic, transferable skills useful in real life experiences today and in the future.

In California, 4-H is a part of the University of California Cooperative Extension. Each county has an Extension office which administrates the 4-H program. In San Diego County the Office is located in building 4 of the County Operations Center 5555 Overland Ave. in San Diego. At the national level, 4-H is under the leadership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Volunteer adults who serve as 4-H Leaders are considered volunteer agents of University of California. Through their local 4-H Youth Development Advisors, 4-H volunteers have access to research and information from the University.





“A blue ribbon 4-H'er with a red ribbon project is more desirable than a red ribbon 4-H'er with a blue ribbon project.”



## How Does the 4-H Program Work?

It's often said, “It is better to build a child than to mend an adult.” This, in a nutshell, is the main objective of the 4-H program. In 4-H, volunteer leaders encourage youth to gain knowledge and learn practical life skills and to apply both in their project area. Members learn to work together as a team and develop a sense of fair play. 4-H members learn decision-making skills through their project work, judging contests and other 4-H activities. As 4-H members mature, they have opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills within their own club and at county activities. They also begin to develop an appreciation and understanding of their community through individual or club community service projects. Members improve their communication skills through club interaction, 4-H record-keeping, and presentations. They also develop positive attitudes about themselves and others; learn basic health and safety practices; acquire educational and vocational experiences; and learn how to set realistic goals for themselves through individual time management. All of this doesn't happen at once, but develops gradually as members continue their involvement in 4-H under the direction of their leader.

## What's More Important - the 4-H Project or the 4-H Member?

The 4-H member, of course! *4-H is a youth development program.* Its objective is to develop young people. Projects are tools for teaching youth by stimulating their interests and develop life skills. Our ultimate goal is for the 4-H member to know more and be able to do more at the end of the year. A commonly stated example of 4-H philosophy is, “A blue ribbon 4-H'er with a red ribbon project is more desirable than a red ribbon 4-H'er with a blue ribbon project.”

## What is the 4-H Leader's Job?

To help 4-H members learn specific project skills. 4-H members have fun with projects while “learning by doing.” Youth remember better if they actually experience something and have an opportunity for some “hands-on learning.” Learning takes place within the learner – it is not something done to the learner. We encourage skills that will be useful to the youth in the future. We help each member develop good habits, experiment with new ideas, and practice problem-solving skills. By doing this, we help them become self-directed, productive, and contributing members of society.

To teach 4-H members how to think, not what to think. We help develop creative thinking in young people by giving them a chance to make decisions on their own.

They'll learn from their own choices. It is important to recognize and encourage each 4-H member so they feel noticed and important. The most significant recognition that can be given to members is praise, attention, or compliments – letting them know they are important and what they have done is worthwhile. This should be done often.

**This is what 4-H is all about – the personal development of the 4-H member!**

## Characteristics of a good leader

A good leader has many characteristics- some may work better for you than others. Most are not more important than any other characteristic, but they may help you enjoy being a successful leader.

These characteristics relate to the way you work with the group of youth (your facilitating style). You may recognize some of your own qualities under “facilitating” style, and hopefully, not too may under “not-so-facilitating!”

(cont. page 3)

**“Facilitating” Style**

- Guides a group through an experience
- Uses different leadership styles when appropriate
- Encourages participation
- Keeps action going on
- Is flexible
- Can tolerate low points in action
- Encourages participation by all
- Is generally low key
- Is a good listener
- Sets a good positive example
- Cares

**Not-So-Facilitating” Style**

- Takes over leadership and directs others
- Makes decisions for group
- Ignores suggestions
- Environment tense or inappropriate
- Lack of preparation
- Evades issues
- Gives solutions rather than letting group come to their own
- More concerned with results than the people involved
- Unconcerned
- Uncomfortable to be around

**Eight Key Elements of Positive 4-H Youth Development**

There are eight key components identified as essential for promoting positive youth development in 4-H Club activities. They include:

**Positive Relationship with a Caring Adult**

How young people understand what it means and what it takes to be a productive citizen, as well as the belief in them selves, depends largely on the adult role models and connections they have to them. A caring 4-H adult volunteer serves as a guide, mentor and role model. The 4-H caring adult helps set appropriate boundaries and expectations.

**Opportunity for Mastery**

These are opportunities for success and achievement of the 4-H members. Mastery is the building of knowledge, skills and attitudes and then demonstrating the competent use of this knowledge and skill. Through hands-on 4-H 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 engaged. The development of mastery is a process that occurs over time and is increased with repetition.

**Opportunity to Value and Practice Service for Others**

Service is a way for 4-H members to gain exposure to the larger community and the world. It is necessary to actively practice and treasure service. Service is more than a product: it is a process that provides developmental opportunities for 4-H members.

**Opportunity for Self-Determination**

Our 4-H youth must believe that they can have impact over life’s events rather than life’s events having control over their lives. We must help our 4-H youth foster that personal sense of influence over their lives, exercising their potential to become self-directing, autonomous adults.

**An Inclusive Environment**

An inclusive environment is one that allows for a sense of belonging, encourages and supports its members and offers encouragement with positive and specific feedback. Healthy 4-H groups celebrate the success of all members- taking pride in collective efforts of all.

**Opportunity to See Oneself as an Active Participant in the Future**

To provide 4-H members the opportunity to see themselves in the future gives them the hope and optimism to shape their life choices accordingly.

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“A caring 4-H adult volunteer serves as a guide, mentor and role model.”



We can teach all the facts and figures we want, but if we don't link them to the future, those facts and figures may go unused.

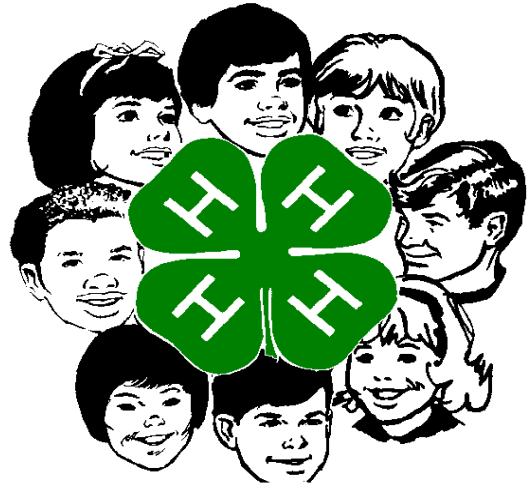
**Engagement in Learning**

An engaged 4-H youth is one who is not only mindful of the subject area, but building relationships and connections in order to develop understanding. Though self-reflection, a person's brain has the ability to learn from experience.

The engaged 4-H youth has a higher degree of self-motivation and an inexhaustible capacity to create.

**An Emotionally and Physically Safe Environment**

4-H youth should not fear physical or emotional harm while participating in the 4-H experience, whether from the learning environment itself, adults, other participants or spectators.



**How can I use the information in this letter?**

**1. New activities to implement in our club program:**

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**2. Other People who could help us and how they might help:**

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**3. Questions to ask U.C. Cooperative Extension staff and other leaders.**

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## Reference Materials

UC Cooperative Extension

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### Letter 1: What is 4-H?

*Letters to New Leaders: Contents*

*San Diego County 4-H Leader Training Manual*

*4-H Memos*, a monthly newsletter to 4-H families and volunteers.

## Welcome to the world of 4-H!

