

Ohio State University Fact Sheet

State 4-H Office

2120 Fyffe Rd., Columbus, OH 43210-1084

Community Service

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4-H has a history of promoting community service. Community service activities have always been an important part of the 4-H experience. In the 4-H pledge, members state that they will strive to use their head, heart, hands, and health to improve their club, community, country, and world.

What Are the Benefits of Community Service?

A 4-H member's involvement in service activities offers an excellent way for youth to practice and enhance their leadership and social skills by working for the common good of their community. Members' participation also helps to build discipline, provide self-satisfaction, foster respect for others, and promote civic responsibility. Community service can also give the youth real world experience in a variety of career fields.

How Does Our Group Get Started?

The most important aspect of starting a group community service project is making sure that all members are involved in project development. When youth are involved in developing a program, they have a stronger commitment due to their sense of ownership. This commitment will increase their enjoyment of activities. Involving youth in the program planning will also create new ideas from their diverse views and experiences.

Once members are interested in a community service project, there are just a few easy steps to follow to make sure the activity is a success.

Step 1: Decide what is needed

Survey the community and take note of any areas which need some care, as well as community assets which could be built upon. Inform members that they are going to decide on a community service project at the next meeting. Ask 4-H volunteers and members to spend interim time looking for projects in the community. At the next meeting, your group can spend some time brainstorming ideas to determine needs in your community. Try to make sure everyone is able to give at least one idea to the group.

Step 2: Decide what should be done

Once a list of possible activities has been developed, members can start to prioritize items. An easy way to do this is list all ideas on a large sheet of paper and give every member five stickers. Each member can then place stickers by ideas that are most important to them. Stickers may be placed on a separate idea or, if a cause is important, multiple stickers may be placed on one idea. Once everyone has had a chance to vote, tally the stickers on each idea to help you select ideas which are most important to the group. From these, members choose a top priority item. This

selection can be done very simply by allowing members to vote again with stickers of a different color.

Step 3: Decide what the group can do

From a broad list of ideas, members have now narrowed concerns to one area. Now the group needs to decide what they can do to assist their community with this situation. Some problems may be too complex for a club to completely solve, however, they can still help with part of it. An example would be litter. 4-H members can't stop people from littering, but monthly roadside cleanups or an educational campaign to help reduce litter in their community could be conducted. Keep safety in mind with all community service activities.

Step 4: Decide what will be done

Members are now getting down to specifics. This stage is planning the community service activity. At this point, the project will need to be defined and members assigned their part in the activity. It is very important to insure that everybody has a part in the endeavor. All members must feel that their assistance is an important part of the operation. One good way to make sure everyone is participating is to list everything which needs to be done, including who will bring supplies, and have youth volunteer for an item that is most interesting to them. Have members list their three most desirable activities and make sure they get at least one of those. Then spread the remaining jobs evenly throughout the group. Everyone should get part of the "grunt work" necessary to complete any project. Be sure to contact the local media before doing the community service project. Not only will a photograph and story promote the group and its service project, but it will also call attention to a need for community service, encourage other groups to plan similar activities, and promote 4-H programs.

Step 5: Evaluation

An important part of community service actually occurs after the hard work is done and tools are put away. The fifth step in a community service project is taking time to review what members have done and learned through this activity. Volunteers may want to give each member an opportunity to share what they gained individually from their experience. This gain can be actual knowledge or simply that warm feeling one receives from helping others. Another means of assisting members in their evaluation may be to have them write a journal of their service activities and what those activities meant to them.

Community Service Activities

The best community service activities for youth are centered around a common interest shared by members of the group. One easy way to identify a common interest is to review the 4-H projects youth are enrolled in. Look for service projects which relate to members' projects. For example, members of a dog group could become trained in pet therapy and work with a retirement center, a photography club could stage an art exhibit to beautify the Courthouse, or a bicycle group could put on a safety demonstration at a local shopping center or store.

Following are a few ideas that may spark an interest for 4-H members:

- ! Clean up a local vacant lot that is overgrown with weeds and debris.
- ! Adopt a highway or street to keep a section of roadside free of litter.
- ! Provide recycling bins at various points throughout your community to collect newspaper, plastic, or aluminum.
- ! Support a local animal shelter by providing blankets, food, cleaning cages or exercising animals.
- ! Set up and maintain an aquarium in a retirement center or hospital.
- ! Coordinate a food or clothing drive to support local shelters for the homeless.
- ! Plant and maintain flowers and shrubbery in parks, schools, or downtown areas.
- ! Conduct a petting zoo with small animals to expose children to animals.

! Work with "Meals on Wheels" to provide food to shut-ins.

There are any number of ideas. The list is limited only by the imaginations of the 4-Hers and their volunteers. Contact the Extension office or local civic organizations for additional ideas, input, or assistance. These groups are always looking for more help in the completion of their mission.

References

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