



# NEW YORK STATE 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

## Membership Policies, Procedures & Guidelines

nys4-h.org

4-H is the Positive Youth Development program of Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE). The mission of the New York State 4-H program is to help youth grow into competent, caring, contributing members of society through hands on learning opportunities. 4-H programs focus on four main pillar areas:

- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)
- Healthy Living
- Civic Engagement
- Agriculture and Food System Sustainability

4-H utilizes a research-based framework of positive youth development that emphasizes project-based learning, supportive and positive adult mentors, and creating a sense of belonging for all youth. In 4-H, youth complete hands-on projects in areas like health, science, agriculture and civic engagement in a positive environment where they partner with adult mentors and are encouraged to take on proactive leadership roles. Youth experience 4-H in New York through in-school and after-school programs, school and community based 4-H Clubs, day and sleep away camping programs, and online experiences. All youth who join 4-H in any of these varied experiences are considered members.

### ***A Deeper Dive into Membership, Enrollment & Belonging***

Enrollment and belonging are often used interchangeably in practice, but they are different. Enrollment is a staff procedure. The enrollment or registration process is a staff decision based on program logistics (what information you need to stay in contact, what risk management considerations, etc.) All youth are enrolled whether we report their participation in the group or individual section of 4-H Online.

Belonging is a youth experience. Belonging is a sense of connection and community. Our vision is that all youth have the opportunity to belong in NYS 4-H, whether this is their first experience or fiftieth. Everyone can belong, no matter how they are enrolled. That feeling of belonging **is** 4-H membership.

**Program Year:** The 4-H program year is October 1 – September 30. Youth may join 4-H at any time during the year, although local CCE Associations may employ different strategies around membership options and recruitment of youth participants.

**Eligibility for 4-H:** Any young person who meets the age eligibility requirements (ages 5-19) is eligible to join 4-H. Youth who turn nineteen years of age, on or before January 1 of the current 4-H program year will be considered graduates of the 4-H program and will be encouraged to retain a connection to the program as 4-H alumni but will no longer be eligible to be an enrolled active 4-H youth member.

Membership is open to all youth and adults without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, age, national origin, political affiliation, physical or mental disability, religion, protected veteran status, genetic information, personal appearance, or any other legally protected class. Persons with an intellectual disability may participate fully in 4-H programs as a youth member as long as their developmental age is considered to fall between five and twenty-one years of age.



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**Program Age Divisions:** Certain programs, contests, and events, and opportunities are provided based on age. A youth member's "4-H age" is their age on January 1 of the program year. The New York State 4-H Age divisions are:

- Cloverbuds – ages 5-7
- Junior 4-H members – ages 8-12
- Senior 4-H members – ages 13-19

Adults age 18 and older may volunteer with CCE 4-H. CCE Association volunteers perform services directly related to the mission of CCE, to support its activities, or to gain experience in specific endeavors without expectation of monetary compensation. Adults 18 – 20 years of age may chaperone, lead, or teach youth, as long as they are under the supervision of a staff member or enrolled volunteer who is 21 years of age and older. See Cornell Cooperative Extension Volunteer Involvement Policies for more information.

**Enrollment Requirement:** CCE Staff have a responsibility to insure all youth are enrolled as either an individual or in a group in 4-H Online. In New York, 4-H members join 4-H through the local CCE Association office in their County of residence, with the exception of the five boroughs of New York City. In NYC, youth enroll through Cornell University Cooperative Extension of New York City.

**Enrollment Fees:** In New York State, 4-H enrollment fees (if applicable) are determined by County Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Associations. Additional fees in 4-H are determined by the costs of specific 4-H programs and activities. These fees are also set by the local CCE Association. The fees for participating in State level 4-H programs and activities are established by the New York State 4-H Office at Cornell University.

**4-H Family:** For purposes of enrollment, a "4-H Family" includes all immediate members of a family who participate in 4-H and who reside together, at least part of the year, at the same address. 4-H Online requires creation of a family profile, which contains individual youth, Cloverbud, and adult volunteer profiles for each family member involved in 4-H.

**Home County:** When joining 4-H for the first time, a 4-H family will choose their Home County. Youth and adults are generally expected to join and participate in a 4-H program in their County of residence.

**Membership Across County Lines:** A family may request to join a 4-H program in a county different from their county of residence. Requests for membership across county lines must be based on reasonable and/or compelling circumstances. For instance, a family may request to join 4-H in a county other than their residence because it is where parents work, where children attend school or afterschool care, or where the family maintains social or familial ties, or there is a particular 4-H program available that is not available in the county of residence. Requests for membership across county lines will be approved by the two county CCE Associations involved and should be based on the understanding that a positive educational experience will result.

**Membership Across State Lines:** A family that lives in another state may request to join a 4-H program in a New York State county. The family must meet the qualifications of NYS 4-H membership, enroll using 4-H Online, and follow NYS 4-H policies, procedures, and guidelines.

**Changing Enrollment County:** A 4-H family's county of membership ("Home County") endures from year to year. A 4-H family may request change of their Home County by making a written or email request. The request must include justification for the change and must be approved by 4-H Educators in both affected programs.



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## Policies Specific to 4-H Community Clubs

**Establishing a 4-H Community Club:** A 4-H Club is a group of 4-H Members mentored by volunteer and professional 4-H Educators. Clubs provide opportunities for youth voice in planning and decision making, which may include electing officers or other formal youth leadership roles. When a group decides to form a club, they meet and establish a program for the year which includes planned projects and activities. The prospective club fills out a Charter Request Form, which is signed by the prospective youth and adult leaders and send it to their local 4-H Educator.

**Membership in 4-H Community Clubs:** 4-H members may participate in more than one club in their home county. There is no limit on the number of clubs a 4-H member may join, but the member is expected to actively participate in and follow bylaws and rules of each club.

**Membership in 4-H Clubs Outside the Home County:** 4-H members may participate in 4-H clubs in a county other than their home county. Members must request membership in another county's clubs and receive approval from the 4-H Educators in both counties and club leader(s).

**Independent 4-H Membership:** While 4-H encourages participation in club settings to promote friendships and interaction with others, for some youth this may not be possible. Independent 4-H members participate in planned learning outside of a club setting. Their work is self-directed with guidance and support of parents and mentors. Check with your county educators for more information on Independent 4-H Membership policies and resources.

**Requesting Membership Permissions:** Members and parents/guardians must follow procedures for requesting and maintaining membership across county or state lines, change of enrollment county, and/or participation in clubs outside the enrollment county. Local 4-H Educators will coordinate and make decisions on requested actions. All membership actions will be recorded in the family's/member's enrollment profile in 4-H Online.



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