



Review Committees Early in the 4-H Year

At the county and state level, committees should be reviewed at the 4-H group's annual meeting. At the club level, committees should be reviewed at one of the first club meetings of the 4-H year. A group's by-laws or committee guidelines should explain the purpose and responsibilities of the various standing and special committees. These documents can also indicate how committees are formed: voluntarily sign up, appointed by the president, elected, recruited by the chair, or some other method. For resources on this topic, see the *Committee Guidelines and By-laws* section of the Committees web page:

<http://4h.uwex.edu/clubs/committees.cfm>

Involve Youth

4-H committees should not be dominated by adults, either in number or in decision-making. Research shows that a major complaint of young people who drop out of 4-H is adults dominating the group. Young people want an active role in decision-making for their 4-H clubs, and committees are an excellent way to provide that opportunity.

At the club level, committees should be primarily comprised of youth. The chair of a club committee should be a youth and an adult can serve as the adult advisor. At the county level, committees should be a youth-adult partnership, wherein half the committee members are youth leaders and half are adult leaders.

Choose a Chair

The chair is chosen for his/her ability to lead the group. The chair can volunteer to serve or be elected or appointed. The 4-H group's by-laws or the committee's guidelines should describe the preferred method. Co-chairs may be an alternative for a committee, with two youth or a youth/adult team providing leadership for the committee.

At the club level, the chair is a youth and at the county level the chair can be a youth or adult volunteer leader. If the chair is a youth, an adult volunteer leader should be designated as the committee's adult advisor. In groups with younger members, the advisor role is very important in helping provide guidance and parameters for the committee work. As members gain experience and confidence, the adult advisor needs to play a lesser role.

The chair does not just plan and conduct meetings, but takes primary responsibility for the group. The chair does not have to be the person who's most knowledgeable about the topic the committee is discussing, but should have the ability to organize individuals into a working group. It may be an advantage for the chair to have served on a committee previously, but this person may not have served as a chair before. Resources for committee chairs (responsibilities checklist, activity planning form, a role description, and more) are available on the Committees web page:

<http://4h.uwex.edu/clubs/committees.cfm> .

Recruit Committee Members

When forming a committee, consider how the membership can be well-balanced, promote learning, and work effectively together. Voting members on committee are 4-H volunteer leaders and youth members. 4-H volunteer leaders must be currently enrolled 4-H volunteers that have completed the Youth Protection Program or 4-H youth members.

- Who has an interest in the kind of activity that the committee will be discussing or planning? Interest and willingness to serve are primary considerations.

- Who has the knowledge and skill, or access to information, needed by the committee? Individuals with pertinent information or a history of effectively serving the committee should be given special consideration.
- Who could benefit most by working on the committee with members who have more experience? The opportunity to provide the experience of learning by doing should not be overlooked. Every member is a potential leader.
- Who might develop a greater sense of belonging or commitment to the club by working on a committee?
- Is a representative committee needed? Often it's wise to have a cross section of the membership represented on the committee: members of different ages and genders, project and activity leaders, etc.
- Who has the best access to the resources needed to do the job? Care should be taken not to overload key individuals.
- Are there some individuals who will work together more compatibly than others? People who have demonstrated their unwillingness or inability to work together normally would not be assigned to the same committee.
- Do committee chairs have any preference as to who they would like on their committee? It is often good practice to ask chairs for suggestions because the responsibility rests with them.

Committee Size

The purpose of the committee should be the primary consideration in determining how large the group should be. Keep in mind that the major reason for having a committee in the first place is the advantage of smaller groups being more efficient and flexible. Size will be determined by the optimum number of people needed to accomplish the purpose of the committee.

Other Considerations

- Keeping committee discussions informal will encourage youth to talk and contribute more freely. This can be an important way to involve new or less active members.
- Since committees permit a wider involvement of members, this can lead to a greater sense of commitment and better attendance at regular meetings.
- Committees should be flexible and easier to convene.
- Small groups may use committees but include all members on the committees. Committee work can be done on alternating meeting dates or prior to the start of the business meeting.
- Some groups tend to turn every issue over to a committee; others spend time discussing an issue when a committee could resolve the issue more easily. Avoid overuse or underuse of special committees.
- There are variations among counties in organizational and committee structures, but communication between committees, 4-H county leader organizations, 4-H members and the 4-H Youth Development Educator is necessary and should be clearly defined.

Adapted by Sarah Wilcox, 4-H Youth Development Program Advisor, UW-Extension Douglas County from University of Illinois Extension, *Working with Committees: A Planning Guide for 4-H Clubs*, <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/committees/index.cfm>; Updated by Sue Pleskac, Volunteer Leadership Specialist University of Wisconsin-Extension



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