

Maximizing Recognition in 4-H

4-H programs use recognition to motivate self-improvement and to provide a feeling of accomplishment in members, volunteers, parents, and supporting adults. To be meaningful, recognition should be in proportion to the quality of the work and should result from sincere effort by a 4-H member and/or volunteer.

Recognizing 4-H members

When recognizing 4-H members for achievement, focus not on earning awards but on developing during project work, participating in 4-H club activities, helping other members, and sharing their experiences.

Consider the differences in age-group interests and abilities when deciding the type of recognition to provide:

- 5- (or kindergarten) to 8-year-olds need special recognition that does not involve peer competition.
- 9- to 12-year-olds are strongly motivated by a 4-H pin or ribbon as an award and a pat on the back from a leader or parent/supporting adult for recognition.
- 12- to 14-year-olds are influenced by such awards as money, county medals, and ranks in organizations; they also seek recognition through added responsibility as a junior leader or club officer and admiration by their peers.
- 14- to 19-year-olds are motivated by trips, scholarships, and recognition given by important people in the community and awarded in a public place, and/or by more adult responsibility being given to them.

National recognition model

The National 4-H Model for recognition promotes a balanced approach to celebrating the progress of groups, youths, adults, families, and parents. Agents using this model recognize improvement equally in five areas: cooperation, participation, peer competition progress toward self-set goals, and standards of excellence. Cooperation overlaps the other four areas.

Recognizing participation in educational experiences

Develop simple criteria to recognize all 4-H'ers who participate in an educational experience. Make recognition a part of the learning experience; allow it to be earned several times; and ensure that it is appropriate for each age level.

Because recognizing participation is most effective immediately after the learning activity, give it at the very basic learning levels of 4-H—the 4-H club/special group meeting or the project group meeting. For example, you could acknowledge a member's participation in:

- A 4-H project group
- A 4-H project workshop, tour, field trip, or camp
- A certain number of 4-H club meetings
- A county/district/state 4-H activity
- The 4-H club meeting program (such as leading the pledge, giving a committee report, introducing a guest)
- The 4-H club's community service project

Examples of awards you might use are caps, certificates, food coupons, gift certificates, membership/participant cards, movie passes, participation ribbons, and T-shirts.

Recognizing progress toward self-set goals

Because it involves the 4-H member setting goals, progress recognition is one step higher than that for participation in an educational event.

4-H'ers should set goals with their families and/or in small group (project) situations. All 4-H members should have personal goals. Involve an adult in evaluating 4-H members' progress toward their goals. Again, give this type of recognition at the 4-H club/special group and project group levels.

4-H members and families can set goals and keep records in a variety of ways. Encourage them to find the method that works best for them. For more information about the record-keeping process, see the *Family Guide for Recordbooks* at texas4-h.tamu.edu/youth_recordbooks.



Recognizing achievement of standards of excellence

The next type of 4-H recognition is comparing a 4-H member's knowledge, skills, abilities and/or accomplishments to an established set of standards. 4-H uses standards of excellence to motivate members but not as much as it uses competition.

Give the members opportunities to compare their work with set standards in activities such as:

- A project/club/county educational presentation activity or other contest in which awards are given based on a blue (100–90 points), red (89–80), or white (79 and below) score
- A photography contest with awards based on a blue (100–90), red (89–80), or white (79 and below) score
- Completion of preset criteria such as one level of award for participating in 10 learning experiences, a second level of award for participating in seven learning experiences, and a third level of award for participating in five learning experiences
- A demonstration of knowledge in a project, a skill, or skills they have learned in their project work, or an exhibit of the results of their project work

Examples of appropriate awards: Certificates, plaques, project pins, ribbons, and project equipment or supplies.

Recognizing results from peer competition

Recognition for competition among peers is prevalent in 4-H. In competition among peers, a winner or champion is named.

The rules must be clearly defined and fully enforced. Because competition brings a high risk to individuals (in their self-image), those involved need to understand that 4-H is a youth development organization and that highly coveted extrinsic awards sometimes become the ends, not the means, for a successful learning experience.

Examples of peer competition:

- County, district, or state events such as an educational presentation, fashion show, Food Challenge, food show, judging contest, quiz bowl, or Share the Fun.
- National competitive events
- Recordbooks
- Scholarships

Examples of awards: Medals, trophies, plaques, monetary awards, buckles, or other things that you can identify to reward success.

Recognizing cooperation

Learning and working together promote high achievement. Cooperation may take advantage of all the skills represented in the group as well as the process by which the group approaches the learning task/goal. Everyone is rewarded.

Principles to use in cooperation include:

- All the young people need to be fully involved in the entire process.
- The goals need to be agreed upon mutually.
- Attention needs to focus on the way the group works as well as to how the project is going.
- The ultimate goal is not extrinsic recognition but the satisfaction of being part of a team effort.
- All members are recognized.

Recognizing parents, supporting adults, and volunteer leaders

Volunteers need to be told that they are doing a good job. Everyone is motivated by the desire to be appreciated and to feel important and needed. Because encouragement and recognition are essential to maintain active involvement in all volunteer groups, a county recognition plan should also commend adults.

Individuals differ in the type of recognition they prefer. Examples of volunteer recognition:

- Certificates
- Gift certificates/coupons
- Notification sent to their employers
- Personal letters

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- Plaques
 - Promotion or new title
 - Publicity through media outlets
 - Special learning opportunities

For more volunteer recognition resources, visit <http://texas4-h.tamu.edu>.

Informal recognition

Sometimes the most meaningful recognition is not a pin, medal, or plaque. Try some of the following recognition methods and watch members, parents, and other leaders develop the self-confidence and desire to do more and better work.

- Ask a young member to lead the pledge.
- Give a junior leader a specific responsibility.
- Introduce new members and guests at club meetings and activities.
- Notice small improvements and compliment members.
- Offer appreciation to leaders for specific efforts.
- Pay partial or all expenses for trips won or for chaperones.
- Send cards to members or leaders who miss a meeting because of illness. When they return, be sure to say, “We’re all glad you’re back.”
- Simply say “Thank you.”
- Take photos of the club and give copies to appropriate members, leaders, and parents.