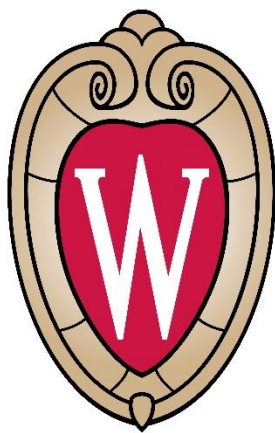


Dane County 4-H New Family Handbook

2025-2026



UW-MADISON EXTENSION

Part 1: 4-H At A Glance



WHAT IS 4-H?

4-H is the nation's largest youth development and empowerment organization. In Wisconsin, more than 150,000 young people in urban, suburban and rural settings are involved with 4-H programs. Youth ages 5-19 can learn important life skills like leadership, teamwork, critical thinking and communication to help prepare them for successful futures – and they do it while engaging in fun, hands-on 4-H activities!

MISSION OF 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The mission of the 4-H Youth Development program is to engage youth, in partnership with adults, in quality learning opportunities that enable them to shape and reach their full potential as active citizens in a global community.

WHAT MAKES 4-H DIFFERENT?

4-H is unique because it is the only youth organization tied to the research base of our nation's land-grant university system. This connection allows the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension staff, and the volunteers they work with, to receive training based on the most up-to-date research on youth development theory and practice.

WHO CAN JOIN 4-H?

4-H is open to all youth in 5K through one year after high school regardless of race, color, sex, creed, disability, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital or parental status.

WHAT IS A 4-H CLUB?

A 4-H club is a group of youth and adults who meet on a regular basis and together practice positive youth development and cooperative learning.

4-H Clubs strive to create, within their group, a quality learning environment that gives members a chance to be an active part of the decision making process; values and respects the voices of all; provides members an opportunity to reflect on and demonstrate their learning; connects members to their community through service; encourages the development of positive relationships with peers and adults; is welcoming and accessible to all; celebrates individual and group achievements; challenges youth to establish and meet individual goals; and provides for the physical and emotional safety of all.

HOW MUCH DOES 4-H COST?

The Dane County 4-H Leaders Association Board of Directors has determined that for the 2025-2026 club year, members will be assessed fees as follows:

2025-2026 Dane County 4-H Annual Membership Dues	
Youth Member (3rd-13th grade)	\$20
Cloverbud (K-2nd grade)	\$3
Adult Volunteer	\$0

Some clubs may cover the cost of these enrollment fees through fundraising efforts. Clubs may also charge additional fees to cover local activities. Please check with the club leader to learn more about what each club charges for participation. Additional fees may apply for 4-H workshops, camps, or programs that youth can choose to participate in. In the event that a member or volunteer is unable to pay the club enrollment fee or a specific program fee, please contact the Dane County 4-H Office. The Dane County 4-H Youth Development Program is open to all regardless of the ability to pay.

WHAT ARE 4-H PROJECTS?

A project may be a topic like geology, photography, poultry, food and nutrition, horses, or bicycling. It can be almost any subject that young people are interested in. Each club offers different projects depending on the needs and interests of youth and availability of project leaders to lead the project. Projects are experiences that help 4-H'ers learn to make decisions. Projects are the "foundation tool" for helping young people develop life skills.

WI 4-H Project Page with Project Guide:

<https://4h.extension.wisc.edu/opportunities/projects/>

**Click Here to learn more about
4-H Projects**

<https://go.wisc.edu/7j87cu>



HOW DOES LEARNING HAPPEN IN 4-H?

The 4-H Slogan: "Learn by Doing"

The 4-H slogan is the educational philosophy of the 4-H program. Young people learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. 4-H programs are designed to provide hands-on experiences that are reinforced through personal and group reflection and application "do-reflect-apply." This research-based educational methodology is called "Experiential Learning." The model below illustrates how 4-H experiences are intentionally developed to optimize learning.

**Click Here to learn more about
Experiential Learning**

<https://go.wisc.edu/y12e2i>

BELONGING

Belonging

Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group.

MASTERY

Mastery

In order to develop self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable and they must experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges.

INDEPENDENCE

Independence

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action.

GENEROSITY

Generosity

Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose.

At 4-H project meetings, youth will practice skills related to a topic of interest with guidance from an adult volunteer.

HOW 4-H BENEFITS YOUTH

4-H Members:

- Gain new life skills while they learn
- Complete projects that are appealing and meaningful to them
- Make friends and create a sense of belonging
- Give and receive acceptance and compassion
- Enjoy themselves while learning

The 4H Study of Positive Youth Development defined and measured positive youth development among 4-H participants over ten years. Compared to their peers, the report shows that youth involved in 4H programs excel in several areas:

4-H'ers are...



WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A 4-H FAMILY?

4-H Youth...

- Complete your enrollment steps through wi.4honline.com – get help from a parent or leader.
- Participate in club meetings, events, and service projects.
- Set and strive to complete 4-H goals.
- Help to share your knowledge with other club members.

4-H Parents and Caregivers...

- Advise your child in the selection of projects.
- Show your interest and enthusiasm for the projects they selected.
- Help guide your child with their projects, but do not do it for them.
- Assist your child in getting to meetings or other events. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to attend local club meetings and county-wide events with their children.
- Be informed by reading the 4-H information sent to your family and asking questions when unclear.
- Ask for a copy of your club's bylaws and constitution or operating guidelines and yearly calendar of events.
- Be a role model of a good sport so that children will learn to celebrate and appreciate the successes of others.
- Check the Dane County Extension 4-H Youth Development website for the latest updates on 4-H programs and opportunities.
- Volunteer to assist with club events and activities when possible.

A LOOK AT THE 4-H YEAR

The schedule below provides an overview of county and state events and due dates. Remember to visit the Dane County 4-H website for specific dates and new opportunities throughout the year:

<https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/dane4hyouth/>

September

- Re-enrollment Begins
- State 4-H Horse Expo
- Record Book Review & Award Applications Due
- Club/Group Annual Financial Review Due

October

- National 4-H Week
- Wreath & Roping Fundraiser Orders Due

November

- Re-enrollments Due Nov 1
- Club/Group Charter Renewal Due
- 4-H Fall Forum
- 4-H Arts Camp
- National 4-H Congress
- Dane County 4-H Leaders Association Meeting
- Wreath & Roping Order Pickup
- Endowment Applications Due

December

- Officer Training
- New Family Orientation

January

- Beef Weigh In
- 1 - Deadline to enroll in a Beef project to determine eligibility for showing at Dane County Fair

February

- Enrollment Fees paid by club due to UW-Extension Office (Club Leaders will collect)

March

- Enroll in Projects by March 1 to Exhibit at Dane County Fair
- 4-H Scholarship Applications Due

April

- Dane County 4-H Leaders Association Meeting
- Swine Check In for Dane County Fair
- National 4-H Conference
- Sheep Check In for Dane County Fair

May

- Space Camp
- 4-H Performer's Festival

June

- Wisconsin 4-H & Youth Conference

July

- Citizenship Washington Focus (CWF)
- Dane County 4-H Summer Camp
- Dane County Fair
- Lodi Fair
- Stoughton Fair

August

- Wisconsin State Fair
- State 4-H Dog Show
- Dane County 4-H Leaders Association Meeting

*Dates may change

READY TO JOIN?

Enroll in 4-H Today! <https://v2.4honline.com/>

- Use the [Family Enrollment Guide](#) if you have any questions during the enrollment process.
- Youth will need to choose projects at the point of enrollment. Please review the list of 4-H Projects available in Dane County ahead of time with your youth.
- Adding/deleting projects after enrollment approval is possible. March 1 is the deadline for project enrollment. (Jan 1 for the Beef Project.) The project areas that youth choose correlate to the exhibits they can show at the Fair and the awards for which they can apply.

Part II: Navigating 4-H as a New Member



Questions to Ask Right Away When Joining a Club:

- Who is the adult organizational leader and how do I contact them?
- When, where, and how frequently does the club meet?
- How does the club handle fees? Do they charge fees in addition to the Dane County 4-H Leaders Association enrollment fees?
- What are the club goals and planned activities for the year?

**Click Here to learn more about
Preparing for the 4-H Year**
<https://go.wisc.edu/cxr390>

Questions to Ask Right Away When Selecting a Project(s) Areas to Enroll in:

- Is it a project I like or think I will like?
- How much is this project going to cost?
- Is the space and equipment I will need to complete this project available?
- How much time will it take?
- Is there someone who can help me if I need it?

Remember:

When selecting a project area, the member should talk it over with their parent(s) or caregiver. Parents, do not decide for your children, but help them decide. Remember, decision making is one of the many important life skills young people can develop in 4-H.

WHAT ARE LIFE SKILLS?

Life skills are the long-range benefits youth gain from participating in 4-H. The term “skill” here means more than physical abilities such as writing, sewing, and athletic achievement. It includes a combination of behaviors, communication styles, and thinking skills.

WHO'S WHO AND WHAT THEY DO

Club Leader

- Provides leadership and guidance to the club or group. Works with youth to guide successful meetings. Helps plan yearly club program. Guides club officers with responsibilities. Keeps club informed of general club matters. Informs parents/caregivers and youth of 4-H activities. Attends leader meetings and training. Assists in recruiting new members. Serves as a liaison to Extension Dane County.

Club Enrollment Coordinator

- Provides leadership for members and adult volunteers who are enrolling in the club. Assists with 4-H enrollment paperwork and processes. Verifies information and confirms enrollments using the 4HOnline system.

Project Leader

- Provides leadership and organization to the project group. Plans, coordinates, publicizes, and conducts project meetings or trainings. Provides encouragement, guidance, and evaluation on project-related topics.

Activity/Event Volunteer

- Provides leadership/organization for an activity or event and/or participate as a member of an activity or event committee.

Adult Advisor/Chaperone

- Works with a team of adult advisors and 4-H Youth Development staff to ensure youth have a safe and positive educational experience.

Committee Volunteer

- Provides leadership for a committee and/or participate as a member of a committee. Creates educational experiences for all youth engaged in the program.

Cloverbud

- Any youth in 5K – 2nd grade who enrolls in 4-H is in the Cloverbud project. Explores 4-H through fun, non-competitive, activity-centered learning experiences.

Youth Leader

- Shares experience or knowledge in a project to help younger members learn and grow. Takes an active role in teaching younger members or serving as a club officer or committee chairperson.

4-H Leaders Association

- Composed of all adult volunteers, enrolled youth members, and their parents/caregivers. Conducts county level programs with youth. Raises funds and manages a budget to support 4-H programs. Coordinates county level recognition for youth and adults. Promotes better understanding of the 4-H program and encourages family involvement in 4-H programming. Led by a Board of Directors.

Extension Dane County Staff

- Provides leadership and support for the Dane County 4-H program. Help plan, conduct, and evaluate the 4-H program. Assist club organizational and project leaders by providing training and research-based resources. Advise the public about 4-H opportunities. Recruit, screen, and train volunteers. Work with county and state decision-makers to build public support for 4-H.

**Click Here to learn more about
4-H Terminology**
<https://go.wisc.edu/000xzx>

WHAT HAPPENS AT A 4-H CLUB MEETING?

A 4-H club meeting is run by youth leaders or youth officers with guidance from adult volunteers. The meetings usually include three types of activities.

Click Here to learn more about
4-H Club Meetings
<https://go.wisc.edu/3pnfcz>

- **Leading (Business/Group Decisions):** This is where youth get to practice democracy in action. Members learn how to express themselves in a group, listen to the views of others, come to a decision either through consensus or parliamentary procedure, and abide by majority rule.
- **Laughing (Group Building/Recreation):** A variety of activities add enjoyment to the meeting. This could include icebreakers, organized games, refreshments, and celebrations.
- **Learning (Education):** “Learning by doing” is one of the key elements of 4-H. Youth can do demonstrations at club meetings to teach skills to others. Clubs may also bring in guest speakers or do service learning activities.

HOW DO I BECOME AN ADULT VOLUNTEER?

Volunteers are the key to successful experiences for 4-H members. Adults who volunteer also reap the benefits of interacting with youth and other adults. There are many ways adults and older youth can participate as volunteers. Volunteers might share knowledge and skills gained through work or hobbies or chaperone at camps and retreats. Check with your club leader or your County Extension Office for more information.

All 4-H Youth Development staff and adult volunteers are required to be trained and screened for the protection of our youth and volunteers. The volunteer enrollment process includes the following steps:

- Enroll in 4-H Online
- Complete required online training program through 4HOnline
- Pass a national criminal background check

Screened and trained volunteers are covered under the University of Wisconsin-Extension liability insurance, as long as they are acting within the scope of their duties as a volunteer.

Click Here to learn more about
becoming a 4-H Volunteer
<https://go.wisc.edu/0bs627>



4-H EMBLEMS AND SYMBOLS

EMBLEM: The 4-H emblem is a green four-leaf clover with a white letter “H” on each leaf. The four H’s stand for **Head, Heart, Hands** and **Health**. These four H’s represent the four-fold training and development offered in the program.

The 4-H emblem is federally protected. When displaying or using the 4-H emblem there are specific guidelines. The stem of the clover must always point to the right. The trademark numbers “18 U.S.C. 707” should appear with the emblem. No part of the emblem may be obscured, no leaves may be removed, and no graphics or text may be superimposed on top of the emblem. The emblem may be displayed in black and white for copying purposes. For complete guidelines concerning the use of the emblem you can contact the UW-Madison, Division of Extension Office or visit <https://4h.extension.wisc.edu/files/2023/02/Using-the-4-H-Name-and-Emblem.pdf>



COLORS: Green and white are the 4-H colors. The white background of the flag symbolizes purity. The green, nature’s most common color, represents life, growth, and youth.

SLOGAN: *“Learn by Doing”* is the 4-H member’s way of growing new skills and learning how to get along with others.

PLEDGE: The Pledge of Allegiance and the 4-H Pledge are recited at the beginning of all 4-H club meetings.

The 4-H Pledge: I pledge...

...My **Head** to clearer thinking
...My **Heart** to greater loyalty
...My **Hands** to larger service, and
...My **Health** to better living,
for my club, my community, my country, and my world.

Click Here to learn more about
the 4-H Pledge
<https://go.wisc.edu/9mhvok>

WHO OWNS 4-H?

4-H is a public organization owned by the USDA – United States Department of Agriculture. 4-H is part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension. The University, USDA, the National 4-H Council, and the Dane County government sponsor it jointly. The University provides faculty, staff leadership and resources. Extension educators and county coordinators join with a strong corps of adult and teen volunteers to conduct local programs. Private support forms a partnership with public funds to support Wisconsin 4-H.

EXHIBITING AT THE FAIR

Fairs provide many opportunities for youth involved in 4-H to learn and grow. Exhibiting 4-H projects at the fair is optional and a wonderful way for young people to showcase their work and receive feedback and recognition. Visit with your club leader or project leader to learn more about 4-H opportunities at the fairs in Dane County.

Youth in Dane County can exhibit at the following local fairs:

Dane County Fair: <http://www.danecountyfair.com/>

Stoughton Fair: <https://www.stoughtonfair.com/>

Lodi Agricultural Fair: <http://www.lodiagfair.com/>

**Click Here to learn more about
participating in Fairs**
<https://go.wisc.edu/vl5d77>

These fairs are not run by Dane County 4-H. Be sure to visit the website of the fair you want to exhibit or get the necessary forms. Members are responsible for turning in their entries on time. It is the member's responsibility to find out the rules of a fair and follow them, while representing Dane County 4-H and following the Wisconsin 4-H Code of Conduct.

CAMP

Dane County 4-H offers outdoor experiences including day camp in Dane County and overnight camp opportunities at the Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Center which is a model residential outdoor learning center, managed by the University of Wisconsin – Madison Division of Extension. The center rests on 318 total acres of forested land on the Wisconsin River, including a 210-acre island called Blackhawk Island.



**Click Here to learn more about
4-H Camp**
<https://go.wisc.edu/6c4la5>

For decades, parents have trusted 4-H camps to help young people build resilience by engaging in positive risks. Having experiences outside their comfort zones, like camp, helps young people become more independent and better able to plan and reach their long-term goals.

4-H camps promote Youth Development principles:

- Competence in lifetime skills
- Confidence in self and others
- Connection with nature, 4-H leaders, and fellow 4-H members
- Caring for the environment, themselves, their peers and leaders
- Character for today's experiences and tomorrow's challenges

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Throughout the year, 4-H members (6th grade and older) have the opportunity to participate in educational travel experiences. These opportunities encourage youth to learn about and appreciate different ideas and perspectives while forming lasting friendships. Some of the opportunities include:

- Summer Academy
- Space Camp
- Citizenship Washington Focus
- National 4-H Conference
- National 4-H Congress

**Click Here to learn more about
4-H Educational Experiences**
<https://go.wisc.edu/v4y3s5>

4-H RECORD KEEPING

Records are a way of recording a 4-H member's growth through learning and experience. Reflection is a very important part of the Experiential Learning Model used in 4-H. Reflection allows you to think about the how's and why's of an experience or activity to identify what you learned through the experience, enabling you to then apply that learning in other situations.

4-H record keeping is helpful in teaching important life skills, such as self-discipline, decision making, goal setting, wise use of resources, communication, sharing, etc. Accurate and up-to-date records and portfolio not only provide a history of your 4-H experience, they are also helpful in successfully completing applications to colleges and universities, scholarships, awards, and employment.

More information on Dane County 4-H Record Book, Participation Reports and forms related to awards is available online:
<https://dane.extension.wisc.edu/4-h-record-keeping-awards-grants/>

**Click Here to learn more about
Maintaining 4-H Records**
<https://go.wisc.edu/kg8z7>

Extension Dane County University of Wisconsin-Madison

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(608) 224-3700
www.DaneCounty4H.org
Office Hours: 8:00am-4:30pm

**Click Here to learn more about
the 4-H Organization Structure**
<https://go.wisc.edu/zc2uvq>

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Sources:

This handbook was adapted from the following sources:

- *4-H Youth Development Family Handbook from University of Minnesota Extension*
- *What happens at 4-H Club Meetings? By Janelle Stewart, Michigan State University*
- *Washington County 4-H Youth Development Enrollment Guide and Family Handbook from Washington County UW-Extension*
- *Handbook for New Families from University of California 4-H*
- *Exploring 4-H for New Families is developed by Heidi Vanderloop Benson, Chippewa County 4-H Program Educator and Ben Hoppe, Brown County 4-H Program Educator, UW-Madison Division of Extension*