



# Self-Determined Projects

## 4-H LEADER GUIDE • EM2957

With your guidance, 4-H members can determine their *own* projects. This makes it possible for them to work on projects that are not in current youth programs. Such projects can develop from something in which the 4-H member is interested, would like to do, or wants to learn about. Self-determined projects encourage the maximum use and development of individual ability and creativity.

A self-determined project can take shape in several ways. A 4-H member could:

- Take a *different direction* on a single phase of an *already existing* project.
- Set up his or her *own plan* to continue or expand on an already existing project.
- Develop a plan for a project not currently listed by Cooperative Extension.

If Cooperative Extension does not have literature or personnel to help with the project, plans can be made to obtain accurate information elsewhere. In fact, part of the learning experiences for the 4-H member is to:

- Search out people who are able and willing to provide help, guidance, information, and skills in the area being investigated.
- Secure information from libraries.
- Write for materials.
- Visit projects of a similar nature.

You must prepare yourself to give guidance to help 4-H members plan, carry out, and evaluate a self-determined project.

Project work is an effective way for 4-H members to explore, to find out what they can do, like to do, or don't want to do. A boy wrote in his story:

"I'm so glad I took the poultry project because I found out I didn't like anything about chickens . . . the way they smell, the feel of their feathers, or cleaning up after them. I thought I wanted to be a broiler raiser but this taught me that I didn't like it."

4-H members need and want guidance in order to decide upon a self-determined project. Find out what your 4-H members are like in order to help them discover their own interests and potentials. Listen, watch, and ask questions.

- What does the 4-H member talk about with friends?
- What are his or her interests, enthusiasms, problems, difficulties?
- What are his or her activities in school and in the community?
- What abilities does he or she seem to have?
  - What attitudes or feelings?
  - What skills or ways of doing and acting?
  - What ideas, information, or understandings?
- What does the member want or wish he or she could do? Today? Tomorrow? Possibly five years from now?

To find out more about a 4-H member, write down the name of a specific young person. List your observations. Think of questions you might ask in order to help him or her discover interests and needs.

### DECIDE ON A PROJECT

The 4-H member, with your help, decides on a project. The work to be done may be in some general area such as: diseases of wheat, genetics, ham radio operation, electronics, bacteriol-

ogy, music of many lands, history of a community, or lawn care.

*Based upon interests and abilities, have the 4-H member list ideas for projects:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

*Considering time, resources, family situation, and help available, narrow possibilities down to a few realistic ideas:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*Have 4-H member pick the one idea he or she will develop as a project:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_

The 4-H member now needs to write down more specifically what he or she wants to learn or accomplish by doing this project. Clearly stated goals or aims are a framework that will help him or her have a positive experience.

### **Setting Up Goals**

Goals are meaningful if stated in terms of "What I hope to learn." Learning implies change and takes place in three interrelated areas:

1. Knowledge, facts, information, thinking, understanding.

2. Feelings, attitudes, values, beliefs, dedications.
3. Skills, ways of doing things, actions, behavior.

### **Finding People To Help**

The 4-H member will need to find out what there is to learn in a project before he or she can write down some goals. He or she could visit with people who have information or ideas on the subject. There are all kinds of possibilities: parents, teachers, neighbors, friends, businessmen, farmers, homemakers, clergymen, mechanics, dietitians, nurses, dentists, laborers . . . anyone who is interested in the subject or who is doing something related to it.

### **Sample Project Statement**

PROJECT: *Ham Radio Operation*

Knowledge:

To learn the Morse code.

To learn what I need to do to obtain an operator's license.

Attitudes:

To enjoy talking, via short-wave radio, with many different people.

To feel that I am able to help others in case of an emergency.

Skills:

To be able to send and receive messages by code and by voice.

To discover sources of information.

In helping a 4-H member successfully tackle a project, you have a very special morale-building role.

You need to provide:

- Empathetic understanding (ability to put yourself in the place of the 4-H member)
- Warmth
- Support
- Encouragement
- Two-way communication

In addition, you help a 4-H member gain added

knowledge, attitudes, and skills—both in content and depth.

## **WORKING ON THE PROJECT**

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Give a 4-H member step-by-step, piece-by-piece guidance as he or she tackles and carries out project work. This includes help with planning experiences, methods, procedures, tasks, and necessary responsibilities.

Encourage 4-H members to:

- Learn how to ask people for help—verbally or by letter. Make appointments with people and respect their time and energy. Inquire about costs when writing for materials.
- Visit librarians to learn how to use libraries. What books, magazines, and pamphlets do they have that give information related to the project?
- Visit persons and places to obtain project information.
- Clip information from newspapers and magazines.
- Watch for help from radio and TV programs.
- Ask to be included in meetings, tours, events, and activities related to the project decided upon.
- Try out, experiment, investigate, and *do* many things to aid learning.
- Learn where to write for literature and materials.
- Review the outline of the project with others.

## **EVALUATING THE PROJECT**

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When a 4-H member can see what he or she has learned in project work and share this learning with others, he or she will gain a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

This is self-evaluation. Suggest many different ways a 4-H member can see his or her own progress. Progress, or improvement is measured in terms of "What did I learn?" The 4-H member continuously evaluates the project's progress.

Ask the 4-H member to keep a notebook to summarize what he or she has learned. Ask:

- Are you learning or accomplishing what you set out to do in your project?
- How will you keep a written record (diary, outline, story) to show how you are progressing toward your goals?
- Do you need to keep track of the money spent and received?
- How could you show the data collected or the results of your investigations or work?

How can you share with other people what you have learned?

- Demonstrations and illustrated talks
- Radio and TV programs
- Newspaper or magazine articles
- Exhibits, window displays, bulletin boards
- Public programs
- Tours
- Workshops
- An open house
- Others

Here is a summary of the learning experiences carried out by a girl in a self-determined project. Try to list all the different methods this girl used to carry out her project. Can you tell from this story:

- What she set out to learn or accomplish (her goals)?
- What she learned from doing these things?

## **Sample Project Summary**

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"My 7th year of 4-H I worked mostly on my demonstration on 'How to Make and Shape Rolls.' I gave this demonstration seven times as part of my special problem. At one of the work meetings I taught the girls taking Foods how to make rolls and helped them. Three of them had never made bread or rolls before. My demonstration four times consisted of making the dough and then showing how to shape rolls with some pre-made dough.

"I also made a science fair project concerning bread. I displayed about seven different mixtures of rye bread. In each of the doughs I used a different percent of rye flour. I also used different types of rye flour, such as dark, light, medium, and meal.

"Along with these I had a written explanation, charts, and other materials that explained about the nutrition. I wrote to fifty different places for information and contacted about twenty people who had information or could help me in various ways. I sent for dozens of cookbooks and recipes and used those we already had. I tried these different recipes and found the ones that I liked best.

"I also experimented and made some of my own recipes. I learned a lot about different flours and bread and rolls.

"We certainly enjoyed the varieties of bread that I made; both shape and flavor."

## **PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING**

More educators are applying research that shows how people learn effectively. You, a teacher-leader of youths, are an educator. Apply the following principles when guiding 4-H members:

- Each young person has individual abilities, interests, needs, background, and home situation. No one list of projects can satisfy every boy and girl.
- An important part of learning is to assume responsibilities by making decisions and setting goals.
- Appropriate learning experiences are those techniques, tasks, and activities that help reach educational goals.
- A young person is more deeply interested in and more highly motivated to carrying out self-

chosen experiences than those handed down by others.

- Boys and girls feel more comfortable and confident when they are able to use their unique abilities and develop their potential.
- Citizenship has more meaning when self-development is coupled with concern for other people.
- Young people want to do things for themselves, but they need and want the ideas, suggestions, and friendly guidance of adults.
- A young person should feel free to explore and should be encouraged to investigate the educational offerings of more than one institution, organization, or person.

Adapted from a Montana State University publication prepared by Geraldine G. Fenn, 4-H Youth Specialist, Montana Cooperative Extension Service.

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