

The Power of Youth in a Changing World



The National 4-H Strategic Plan

4-H: The Power of Youth in a Changing World

Youth are powerful, energetic, committed members of society, whose strength as leaders is the core of the 4-H youth development movement. Youth have the power to contribute significantly to communities, to be equal and caring partners, to create positive change, and to imagine new possibilities and directions. As young people learn, building their skills and knowledge, their power increases. The 4-H movement brings young people and their families together with volunteers, community members, and professionals in a powerful partnership through which all involved learn and grow. Today as never before, the 4-H'er's pledge to work for the betterment of the community, the country, and the world can be realized: the success of the 4-H movement can have a worldwide impact.

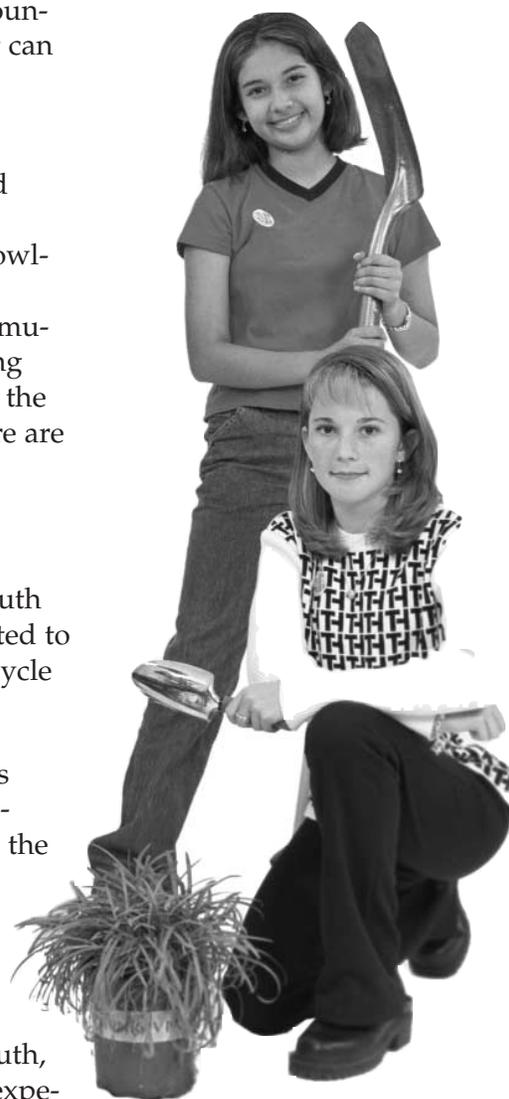
Countries, regions, and people all over the world are coming closer together through integrated economies, advances in technology, and global communications and marketing. For people and cultures to thrive, the next generation must be prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to build strong, sustainable economies and with the values and principles necessary to nurture successful societies, communities, and families. 4-H youth will live in a world in which accepting and living with diversity, understanding the individual's impact on the well-being of others, and sharing the human dream of a better future are not only desirable but essential.

The Principles

In the early phases of developing the new strategic plan for 4-H, youth and adults, volunteers and staff members and supporters were invited to be part of the "revolution" coming to 4-H. Now that this planning cycle is almost complete, what is the revolution all about?

The National 4-H Strategic Plan rests on five fundamental principles which, if achieved, will indeed create a revolution for the 4-H movement. Like the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Information Revolution, this is a progression towards the fullest achievement of our destiny, making our ideals and values become reality for everyone we encounter. The strategic plan provides the spark, the inspiration to get the revolution started.

What are the revolutionary principles? Celebrating the power of youth, widening the circle and welcoming others, changing lives through experiential learning, helping our people to flourish, perfecting the ways we work. These are principles we have always valued, but too often we have been willing to compromise, to be satisfied with partial victory.



We can be satisfied no longer: the realities of 21st-century America demand that we live our principles fully, every day in everything we do. If we settle for nothing less, 4-H will never be the same.

The Process

The National 4-H Strategic Planning process was led by the Strategic Directions Team. Discovery Teams made up of youth, volunteers, and youth development professionals, who in turn gathered information from thousands of youth and adults from all over the country, assembled answers to critical questions about 4-H's future:

- What critical issues and important opportunities must 4-H explore?
- What does 4-H have now that should be used to our advantage?
- How must we change in order to create the future we want for ourselves and for America's youth?

The answers served as a guide for the Strategic Directions Team to follow and, combined with vital information from the fields of youth development, public policy, and community-based leadership, grew into the National 4-H Strategic Plan.

The Power

We stand at the threshold of a 4-H youth development revolution. The power to make it happen lives in you. Because the 4-H movement thrives in local communities, the plan will, too. Each individual in 4-H can act to advance the revolution.

Within the framework of the plan, every youth, volunteer, professional, club, county, and state will create actions and strategies to turn the revolution into reality.



4-H Youth Development Vision

A world in which youth and adults learn, grow, and work together as catalysts for positive change.

4-H Youth Development Mission

4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnership with caring adults.

4-H Youth Development Values

We, the youth and adults of the 4-H movement, value

Youth as powerful members of society

Youth and adults as caring partners

Learning as a lifelong commitment

Diversity and social conscience

Doing our best and making it better

Therefore

We believe that youth are powerful members of society, with the ability to contribute significantly to their communities, to create positive change, and to imagine new possibilities and directions.

We believe that youth are equal and caring partners, bringing unique energy, knowledge, and perspective to the work they do—they are keepers of the vision.

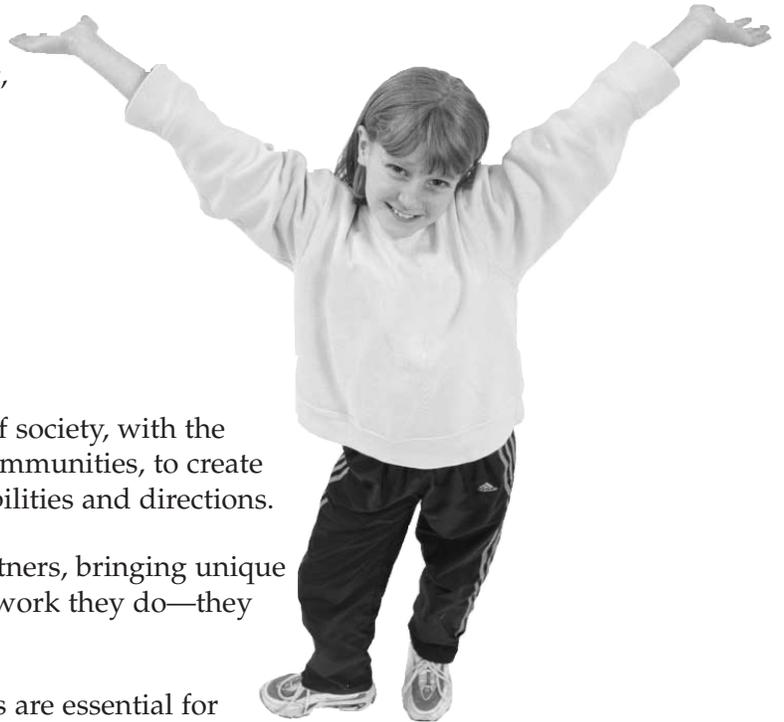
We believe that relationships with caring adults are essential for youth to achieve their potential because of the guidance, respect, knowledge, and wisdom adults can share.

We believe that learning is a lifelong commitment for citizens of a democracy, enhancing self-determination, independent thinking, and self-esteem, and that learning-by-doing promotes practical skills, confidence, and experience for both youth and adults.

We believe that a social conscience is built on service and volunteerism, that a commitment to diversity depends on embracing and respecting difference, and that both are essential to making our society a better place.

We believe that our youth are the future of our nation and our world, and that they deserve nothing less than our best.

Because we believe in these things, we touch the future through the 4-H youth development movement.



4-H Youth Development Core Capabilities

Our core capabilities reflect strong expertise that 4-H youth development has to offer and also suggest how we must change to accomplish the strategic plan. Not all are unique to 4-H, but the unique synergy of these capabilities makes us different and special in the communities we serve. We believe these capabilities add exceptional value to 4-H youth development programs.

Exceptional Human Capacity

Contributing, empowered youth
Dedicated, supportive families
Highly educated professional staff
Talented, enthusiastic volunteer base

Strategic Resource Development Partnerships

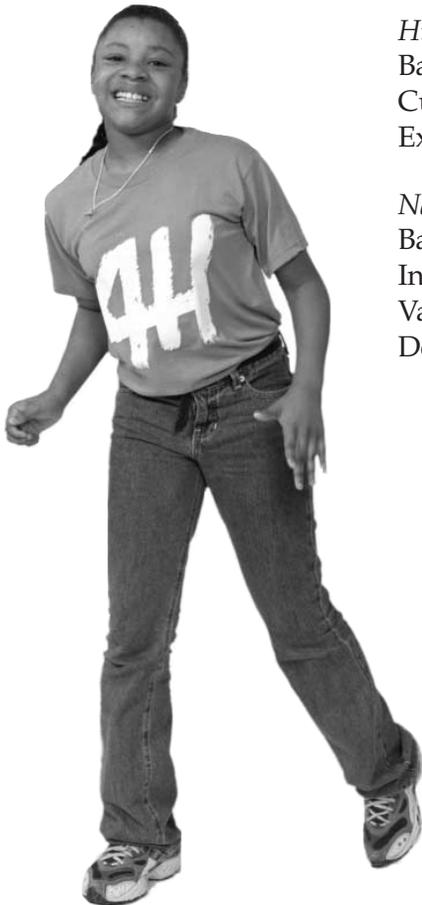
Public-private collaboration
Funded at three distinct levels: local, state, federal
Alumni and community support

High-Quality Educational Programs

Based in youth development research
Customized for each community, personalized for each individual
Experiential learning

Nationwide Community-Focused Network

Based in the land-grant university system
In every county
Variety of delivery models
Decentralized, shared leadership model



The Power of Youth

If we really care about youth, if we really want them to succeed, we must reorganize around them. Ask yourself “What does it take for youth to become fully engaged as valued partners? Am I not only providing leadership opportunities and gaining the unique perspectives of youth but also *transforming* the relationships we have with youth in designing, delivering, and governing 4-H programs?”

Goal 1: 4-H will create a culture in which youth are equal partners in decision-making and governance.

Recommendation: Involve youth in all 4-H advisory groups, design teams, and management committees in meaningful roles.

Recommendation: Employ 4-H youth to coordinate and direct 4-H programs.

Goal 2: 4-H youth will be full partners, resources, and contributors in developing, delivering, and evaluating our educational experiences.

Recommendation: Create, promote, and recognize youth roles as learners, producers, and teachers.

Recommendation: Establish opportunities for youth and adults to plan, learn, and work together in effective partnerships.

Recommendation: Provide opportunities for youth to share their expertise as mentors to adults.

Recommendation: Incorporate youth culture and ways of communicating and learning into the program design and delivery of 4-H.

Goal 3: 4-H youth will develop an ethic of philanthropy and civic engagement.

Recommendation: Provide learning experiences to give youth the skills and confidence to advocate for the power of youth.

Recommendation: Ensure that all youth have opportunities for service learning and community service.

Recommendation: Create learning experiences that give youth skills in generating increased resources (time, money, materials, expertise) to address issues important to them.

Recommendation: Engage youth in hands-on philanthropic learning experiences.



Goal 4: Youth will lead 4-H in new and creative technological directions.

Recommendation: Provide youth with the opportunity to give input on program and project direction through the use of technology.

Recommendation: Create youth-led efforts to increase public access to technology.

Recommendation: Apply new technology as it emerges to keep 4-H innovative and exciting for the future.



Access, Equity, and Opportunity

We know what 4-H can do in the lives of young people. Now, more than ever before, we must ensure that 4-H serves all communities by providing equitable access and opportunity for all youth, volunteers, and staff. We must be aggressive in reaching unserved, under-served, and under-represented children and their families and in leveraging our extensive networks and technology to help people make decisions and solve problems. Now is the time for stronger voices, for thoughtful action, and for a commitment to widen the circle and welcome others.

Goal 1: Extension and 4-H will develop an ethic of access and opportunity for all youth.

Recommendation: Create a culture within the 4-H youth development movement that embraces all youth.

Recommendation: Develop a broad definition of 4-H youth development that is recognized throughout the Extension system.

Recommendation: Ensure opportunities for all youth to participate in long-term, sustainable relationships under the direction of caring adults in community-based settings.

Recommendation: Enliven all 4-H educational and communications media by representing diverse groups of youth and adults.

Recommendation: Ensure that all youth have the opportunity to successfully compete for special 4-H experiences, scholarships, offices, etc., in those areas of the 4-H program that involve competition.

Goal 2: 4-H will invest in youth and their future by providing equitable access and opportunity to all communities.

Recommendation: Design, implement, and evaluate research-based, culturally sensitive approaches to engage diverse audiences and communities.

Recommendation: Actively engage the public and the private sectors in generating resources to reach under-served, diverse audiences.

Recommendation: Build working relationships with and become active partners of other entities that serve diverse audiences, such as state and local businesses, youth-serving organizations, and governmental agencies.

Recommendation: Become fully involved with all educational systems, including public, private, charter, and home schools.

Recommendation: Expand relationships with existing culturally or ethnically based centers of volunteerism and community service.



Recommendation: Make all 4-H youth development programs culturally and linguistically relevant and available to the target audience.

Recommendation: Ensure that youth with physical and developmental challenges have access to all 4-H opportunities and are actively encouraged to become involved.

Recommendation: Create, implement, and evaluate new models to maximize 4-H participation within urban and suburban centers.

Goal 3: The 4-H volunteer and staff community, at all levels, will be skilled and knowledgeable in interacting with children and families from diverse groups.

Recommendation: Identify existing structures and opportunities within the Extension system to stimulate cross-cultural ideas and to aid in communication and networking.

Recommendation: Collaborate at the local and state level to help build community leadership and make Extension and 4-H a more visible partner in working with all audiences.

Recommendation: Work through our professional associations to increase awareness of the importance of building cultural competence.

Goal 4: 4-H will become technologically savvy so that 4-H youth and adults will thrive in a technology-based society.

Recommendation: Leverage 4-H, Extension, and the land-grant university system to create a national dialogue and address the issue of reaching remote, rural, and under-served audiences.

Recommendation: Create positive youth development experiences in which youth and adults can learn, have fun, and form relationships with adults and other youth, regardless of geographical location or face-to-face participation.



An Extraordinary Place to Learn

We know that good educational experiences can change a child's life. 4-H combines an imaginative, motivational learning environment with outstanding curriculum as well as energetic and caring staff and volunteers to create the experiential learning model. The model uses three steps to help youth succeed. Youth engage in exciting, hands-on learning activities, reflect on their experience and identify the concepts learned, and apply those concepts in new learning situations. We must use our scholarship and practice in the field of experiential learning to revolutionize the ways youth build confidence and master critical life skills in all 4-H activities. While 4-H uses many delivery methods to bring the learn-by-doing experience to youth, the club, however it is constituted, is the essence of the 4-H experience—youth and adults working and learning together in a caring, sustained relationship.

Goal 1: 4-H youth development will strengthen the relationship between research and practice using the resources of land-grant and other university systems.

Recommendation: Research the effectiveness of current experiential learning approaches and adopt improved techniques and best practices.

Recommendation: Encourage developers of all 4-H curricula to conform to the national 4-H criteria for outstanding youth development curricula.

Goal 2: 4-H will imagine and design new, unconventional educational models to capitalize on emerging opportunities and engage the hearts and minds of youth.

Recommendation: Identify successful and unconventional 4-H youth development models and share these broadly with the 4-H community.

Recommendation: Create and adapt self-assessment instruments to help youth determine their interests and to custom-tailor 4-H experiences that develop life skills.

Recommendation: Involve youth in creating engaging, interactive curriculum that addresses regional, national, and global issues facing youth.



Recommendation: Establish new and creative partnership models which enable youth to sustain long-term relationships with caring and supportive adults.

Recommendation: Ensure that all 4-H programming strengthens one or more life skills.

Goal 3: 4-H will use new technologies to shape learning opportunities that go beyond boundaries of geography, time, expertise, and leadership.

Recommendation: Invigorate existing 4-H events and activities, and deliver them more efficiently through the use of new technologies.

Recommendation: Integrate computer technology and communications technology to increase educational effectiveness while maintaining a balance between “high tech” and “high touch.”

Goal 4: 4-H will promote scientific and technological literacy.

Recommendation: Increase scientific content, process skills, and use of technology in 4-H programs.

Goal 5: 4-H will maximize the effectiveness of our delivery modes.

Recommendation: Enhance offerings of 4-H clubs, which offer long-term, sustainable opportunities for youth under the direction of a caring adult in community-based settings.

Recommendation: Promote and sustain 4-H clubs that vary in size and scope, from one-on-one interaction to complex and innovative systems that connect people and bridge emotional, physical, and geographic barriers.

Recommendation: Establish minimum standards for life-skills content and contact hours for school enrichment programs.

Recommendation: Develop a comprehensive series of high-quality experiential school enrichment curricula for nationwide use that conforms to national academic standards.

Recommendation: Challenge and prepare providers of youth programs to practice creative experiential learning techniques.

Recommendation: Position 4-H leadership to provide exceptional programs and services to after-school programs.



Goal 6: 4-H will collect national impact and accountability data that fully demonstrates the impact of 4-H on youth, their families, and communities.

Recommendation: Using web-based technology, develop a virtual research and evaluation center that focuses on measuring the impact of 4-H youth development programming efforts.

Recommendation: Create a dynamic research agenda to guide the efforts of youth development scholars and practitioners.

Recommendation: Assess the effectiveness of the current reporting system.

Recommendation: Incorporate the knowledge accumulated in the national 4-H impact study into 4-H programs and services.



Exceptional People, Innovative Practices

In 4-H, we draw strength from our allegiance to a cause that is truly noble. We know that 4-H can make a difference in the lives of youth. We are relentless campaigners about the value of 4-H, but we need the courage to leave some of the familiar and comfortable behind and to strike out for parts unknown. We need to be poised not only to attract newcomers but also to let them have their say. We must pay attention to what staff and volunteers need to keep their work responsive to the needs of youth, yet satisfying and creative for themselves. The Internet has become one of the most powerful, important forms of communication that has ever existed, ranking right up there with speech, the written word, and moveable type. In 4-H, we must use the technology to adjust our human resources practices and share our commitment to the profession of youth development education.

Goal 1: Extension and 4-H will recruit, hire, and retain top-notch people who have a heart for working with youth and an enduring commitment to youth development.

Recommendation: Increase the use of competencies as the basis for recruitment and selection of outstanding youth development professionals.

Recommendation: Create innovative marketing and recruitment efforts to attract new, talented individuals who reflect the changing demographics of the local community or population.

Recommendation: Create a retention and recruitment plan to develop visionary leaders to fill key program and administrative roles.

Recommendation: Use awards and recognition incentives for staff and volunteers who conduct outstanding and innovative efforts that contribute significantly to 4-H's ability to understand and reach our audiences.

Recommendation: Solicit input from employees and volunteers to develop recognition and reward systems to build retention.

Recommendation: Address the issues which help employees create a balance between their work and personal lives.



Goal 2: 4-H will design volunteer management systems which attract, retain, and energize youth and adult volunteers with a progressive and enduring commitment to youth.

Recommendation: Pioneer new ways to encourage youth and adults to give their time, their talents, and their service to 4-H.

Recommendation: Create, design, and support 4-H volunteer programs through greater collaboration among states and other volunteer organizations.

Recommendation: Establish state-level professional positions to serve as catalysts and leaders for volunteer development and expansion.

Goal 3: Extension and 4-H will invest in its people by providing exceptional learning opportunities.

Recommendation: Ensure that all professional staff have equal access to quality training and the resources they need to be effective.

Recommendation: Increase the availability and appropriateness of learning opportunities for both volunteers and youth development professionals.

Recommendation: Use our technology, program experience, and ideas as well as our national system to better manage programs and organize the materials available to staff and volunteers.

Recommendation: Expand, create, and sustain collaborative partnerships to build capacity for youth development work.

Recommendation: Train 4-H volunteers and staff in applying technology in the integration, design, and delivery of educational programs.

Goal 4: Extension, 4-H, and our land grant institutions will advance the field of youth development education.

Recommendation: Build internal working relationships around a common vision of positive youth development.

Recommendation: Leverage relationships among higher-education institutions and larger youth-serving agencies to build a system of professional preparation through post-secondary education.

Recommendation: Foster collaboration and engagement among all land grant institutions.

Recommendation: Validate the 4-H youth development profession.

Recommendation: Increase research and evaluation efforts in the field of youth development.



Effective Organizational Systems

Institutions survive because their missions are timeless, ethical, and imperative. Yet, while the 4-H mission endures, new approaches to achieve the mission require new ways of thinking and working. We must marshal our resources, talent, and respect to create an organization that outperforms our aspirations.

Goal 1: The 4-H mission and strategic plan will be achieved through the synergy of shared leadership.

- Recommendation:** Develop a national leadership structure for 4-H that reflects the voice and power of states and counties.
- Recommendation:** Develop state and local leadership structures for 4-H that reflect the voice and power of local constituents.
- Recommendation:** Build strong shared local and state leadership models and practices that maximize the impact of the perspectives and contributions of youth, adults, volunteers, and staff.
- Recommendation:** Ensure that emerging structures promote and support flexibility, clear priority setting, and shared accountability.
- Recommendation:** Develop a more flexible system for managing the 4-H name and emblem that reflects the realities of the youth culture and marketplace in the 21st century.
- Recommendation:** Open a dialogue among members of the 4-H youth development system about issues related to branding every Extension youth program with the 4-H name and emblem and reporting them all as 4-H.
- Recommendation:** Develop criteria and methodology for determining organization priorities for funding and partnership.
- Recommendation:** Develop national criteria for guiding decision-making as to whom 4-H will partner with, accept funding from, and invest in.

Goal 2: Strategic collaboration and partnerships will be an integral part of achieving the 4-H mission.

- Recommendation:** Improve and enhance the work of 4-H system-wide, by building partnerships and engaging in collaboration within the land grant university and Extension systems.
- Recommendation:** Expand, create, and sustain collaborative partnerships and relationships with other agencies and organizations in order to further national, state, and local youth development work.
- Recommendation:** 4-H in the USA will develop and expand partnerships in the international youth community.



Goal 3: 4-H will create bold, innovative, resource-development initiatives.

Recommendation: Develop a comprehensive plan for developing resources that demonstrates our commitment to achieving the 4-H Strategic Plan.

Recommendation: Recognize 4-H fund development as a shared responsibility.

Recommendation: Create a systematic and national management approach which responds to resource development opportunities as they arise.

Recommendation: Secure new federal, state, and local funding sources with state and local partners.

Goal 4: The 4-H brand will be readily recognized, exciting, and appealing to all 4-H's audiences.

Recommendation: Gather research with internal and external audiences to inform all marketing efforts.

Recommendation: Be proactive stewards of the 4-H brand.

Recommendation: Create a marketing plan for national, state, and local use to ensure that youth voices resonate in all marketing materials and messages.

Goal 5: Extension and the Land Grant System will support the expanding role of 4-H professionals as community resources in youth development research and practice.

Recommendation: Create new models of 4-H program management that are consistent with 4-H Professional Research and Knowledge Taxonomy (PRK).

Recommendation: Expand system support of local 4-H youth development professionals in research, alternative staff designs, and new organization systems and structures.

Recommendation: Develop risk-management plans at local, state, regional, and national levels of 4-H to ensure protection of the youth, the volunteers, the professionals, and the organization.

Goal 6: 4-H will develop, implement, and broadly communicate a research agenda for 4-H youth development.

Recommendation: Study effective organization systems and design as a basis for continually assessing, testing, and applying new and existing models for 4-H.

Recommendation: Develop partnerships with the information technology community to accomplish a cost-benefit analysis of strategies related to communications and learning processes.

Recommendation: Clarify and articulate the connection between youth development and prevention education.

Recommendation: Seek major funding to do research into youth development.

Recommendation: Build research and evaluation efforts that include incentives for collaborations between departments within a single institution and across institutions within the land grant system.

Recommendation: Ensure quick and useful translation, dissemination, and transformation of research into application that enhances practice.



The National Strategic Directions Team is made up of leading innovators representing 4-H youth, volunteers, and faculty from across the country and their most strategic partners, National 4-H Council and the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. Their task is to address the most fundamental challenge of our time: how to pioneer innovative strategies in 4-H Youth Development for the next generation.



The photos inside this publication feature members of Texas 4-H. We thank the Texas 4-H program for the use of these photos.

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