



Citizenship

The 4-H Youth Development program provides many opportunities for young people to develop and strengthen skills and abilities that will allow them to be contributing citizens in communities that they live and/or interact. For more than a century, the 4-H program, through multiple delivery methods (i.e., clubs, camping, afterschool, etc.) has engaged young people to strengthen decision-making, communication, teamwork, problem solving, and critical thinking skills.

“Recent research confirms that 4-H youth, from grades 5-9, are more civically active and contribute more to their community than youth in other out-of-school time activities” (Lerner, et al., 2009).

In states across the country, 4-H members participate in programming that broaden their understanding about democratic processes, values and civic traditions reflecting 4-H’s long standing commitment to citizenship - group decision making, elected officers, meaning of historic symbols, monuments, pledges, songs, community involvement and effectively bringing about change in communities in partnership with adults.

Research reveals that not all youth are engaged in their communities, outside of school (Lopez, Levine, Both, Kiesa, Kirby, & Marcelo, 2006) to the degree that will lead to successful contributions as adults. A leading contributor to the lack of engagement is



the fact that opportunities for learning about citizenship is highly unequal (Kahne & Middaugh, in press) among youth of different backgrounds, cultures, race, and socio-economic status. In a 2006 report, Lopez et.al.

found that only 19% of young people (aged 15-25) worked within the last year individually or in a group to solve a problem in their community and only 10% were confident that they could make a difference in their communities. At the same time, these same young people did believe that when people worked together, they could make a difference and help their communities. These findings demonstrate the significant need for the 4-H Youth Development program to provide the opportunities, support, and access for young people to become engaged and make a difference in their communities.

We believe that:

- **Citizenship is an ongoing, intentional process.**
- **With appropriate adult support, access to resources, knowledge and skills, youth can and will take an active role in their communities.**
- **Active youth contribution leads to a lifetime of engagement.**

For more than 107 years, 4-H members have actively engaged in addressing many of these and other challenges. However, now is the time for the 4-H Youth Development program to renew its commitment to citizenship as an integral and important component of the organization to ensure a lifetime of contribution as youth enter adulthood. From the 4-H Citizenship Ceremony at National 4-H Conference to the Citizenship Improvement Study released in 1953 to international exchanges to the formal establishment of the 4-H Citizenship Mission Mandate, citizenship has played an important role in shaping the 4-H Youth Development program. More recently, through the 4-H National Headquarters *Programs of Distinction*, individual programs have been identified that demonstrate excellence in citizenship.

4-H Citizenship Programming

Every 4-H program in the country conducts educational programs that strengthen the skills and abilities of young people to be contributing citizens. The 4-H program has a strong history of developing and implementing programs related to community service, youth leadership, civic education, youth in governance, youth volunteerism, public speaking, service learning, youth voice, and youth-adult partnerships.

[Programs of Distinction](#) is a recognition program that highlights high quality youth development programs within Cooperative Extension occurring in communities across the United States. Programs awarded the title of “*Program of Distinction*” are added to the collection of program descriptions housed in a searchable web database.

The following are examples of programs that focus on citizenship, broadly, or have widely recognized components of citizenship embedded in the program. States are strongly encouraged and challenged to submit Programs of Distinction so that we may communicate successful programs internally, and to external stakeholders.

- * [4-H Great Lakes and Natural Resources Camp \(Michigan State University\)](#)
- * [Diverse Youth-Adult Partnerships in Rural Nebraska \(University of Nebraska, Lincoln\)](#)
- * [Community Improvement through Youth – CITY Project \(Cornell University\)](#)
- * [4-H Mentoring – Youth & Families with Promise \(Utah State University\)](#)
- * [Florida 4-H Legislature \(University of Florida\)](#)
- * [4-H Winter Leadership Camp \(University of Wisconsin – Extension\)](#)

www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/about/pod.htm



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4-H strengthens citizenship by...

participation in organized clubs and groups * leadership roles at the county, state, and national level * exploration of individual interests through projects and activities * practicing democratic rules such as majority choice, debating, and listening to others * youth led service projects * youth and adults working together * and much more!

In the next twelve months:

- Develop and convene a leadership structure for the 4-H Citizenship Mission Mandate that is representative of the 4-H system to: (1) identify and develop partnership opportunities that will deepen learning experiences for youth at all levels; (2) identify ladders of success for youth citizenship; and (3) identify the necessary components of any 4-H citizenship experience;
- Convene a think-tank of internal and external stakeholders to identify gaps in citizenship programming and make recommendations on future 4-H opportunities;
- Engage the 4-H system to identify and promote high quality citizenship programs and/or initiatives.
- Identify, review, and capture key elements of previous work done for the 4-H system related to citizenship (i.e., literature reviews, curriculum, etc.); and
- Partner with organizations to engage 4-H members and adults across the country to identify local needs, develop plans, and implement service projects, such as the Corporation for National & Community Service’s 2010 MLK Day of Service where young people may commit to a year of service.

References:

- Kahne, J. & Middaugh, E. (in press). Democracy for some: The civic opportunity gap in high school. In J. Youniss & P. Levine (Eds.). *Policies for youth civic engagement*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt Press.
- Lerner, R., Lerner, J., & Phelps, E. (2009). *Waves of the future: The first five years of the 4-H study of positive youth development*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council.
- Lopez, M.H., Levine, P., Both, D., Kiesa, A., Kirby, E., & Marcelo, K. (2006). *The 2006 civic and political health of the nation: A detailed look at how youth participate in politics and communities*. College Park, MD: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE).