



Goal Setting

Leader's Guide to Helping Youth

4-H is a youth development program. Facilitating youth development is the role and responsibility of adults who work with youth in 4-H. One way to fulfill this role is to help 4-H members plan, write and evaluate their progress toward goals.

Early in the 4-H year, help your members make plans for the year. Whether you are working with one person or the entire club, the steps are the same. You need to think about the 4-H member, their home situation, previous 4-H (and other) experiences, interests and abilities of the youth. Give some thought to what you expect from them. Encourage the members to challenge themselves, but be realistic because 4-H is only part of their busy lives.

Ages and Stages ~ How This Affects Goal Setting

The ability of youth to set and attain goals is affected by the age and developmental stage of the individual child. The following age/grade ranges can be used as a guide, but remember that children are individuals and all advance at a different pace.

Ages 5-8 ~ Grades K - 3

- Thinking is here and now, not in the future.
- Learn best when physically active.
- May complete simple projects.
- Exploring possibilities is more important than reaching a goal.

Ages 9-11 ~ Grades 4-6

- Acceptance by peer groups is important.
- Feelings of competence enhances self-concept.
- Can set short-term goals.
- Interests expand from home to neighborhood, to community.

Ages 12-14 ~ Grades 7-8

- Can take responsibility in planning and evaluating their own work.
- Want to make decisions but still depend on adult guidelines.
- Can set long-term goals and plan strategies to reach goals.
- Implements simple plans.

Ages 15-19 ~ Grades 9-12

- Abstract thinking and problem solving reach a higher level.
- Implements strategies for reaching long-term goals.
- Manages resources to achieve a goal.
- Exerts effort and perseveres toward goal attainment.
- Needs life planning guidance.

Plan for Setting and Attaining Goals

Help youth to determine interests.

Typically this step occurs at the beginning of the 4-H year. To help young people focus on their interests, ask questions and listen. Share the New Hampshire 4-H Project Selection Guide with your members. Make it a point to find out what each child enjoyed doing in the past and what kinds of things each would like to try in the future. Then you can guide them as they make plans based on what they have already learned and what they would like to learn.

Help youth to set their goals.

Ask questions. How did what you did last year in your project work for you? Why was or wasn't that a problem? Based on your experiences last year, what would you like to do or learn this year?

Remember the three parts of a measurable goal:

- Action - how you will do something,
- Result(s) - what you are going to do, and
- Timetable - when you are going to do it.

For example "I want to learn how to bake two kinds of cookies by Christmas." - **I want to learn** is the action portion of the goal. What you intend to do is the result - I want to learn **to bake two kinds of cookies**. When is the amount of time it will take to complete the goal - I want to learn to bake two kinds of cookies **by Christmas**.

	ACTION	RESULT	TIMETABLE
I want	to learn	to bake two kinds of cookies	by Christmas.
I want	to give	two demonstrations for my club	by June 1.
I want	to train	my dog to sit and lay down	before the county dog show.

If you're not certain that a member can carry out a goal easily, you can give it a "control test." Does the youth have control over what they want to do? Does the action part of the goal tell what they will do? A member will have control over a goal such as "I will learn to identify ten kinds of trees on my property this fall." However, if the action mentioned in the goal is what someone else will do, it does not pass the control test. The goal statement, "I will win the high point trophy at the state 4-H Horse Show," does not pass the control test because the judge provides the action that decides who will win the high point trophy.

Form an action plan

The next step in goal setting is developing an action plan. At this stage, it is important to help 4-H members think about the information needed and the skills required during the year to accomplish their goals.

Once the youth have written one or more goals, encourage them to write them into their *Project Page*. Now ask them about what they need to do to meet the goal. Do they need to read or do research about something? Do they need to learn a special skill to meet their goal? How much practice will it take? Invite them to list the steps necessary and what other resources might be needed to reach their goals on the *Project Page*. Ask them to think about who will help them reach their goals. It might be their parents, a 4-H leader or a more experienced 4-H member.

Remember that skills are things you physically do - like planting seeds and weeding. Knowledge is using your brain - like knowing what a healthy garden needs to grow.

Youth can organize their time, by entering the steps identified on the *4-H Goal Calendar*. They may have to plan “backwards” based on the timetable established. Encourage them to keep their *Project Page* and *4-H Goal Calendar* with their *County 4-H Records*. This information will be useful to track progress and to see growth over the years.

Encourage members to share their goals with someone else. Talking about goals with another 4-H member, their 4-H leader or family member is helpful. When youth talk to others about their goals, it helps them get a better idea of what they are going to do.

Carry out the plan and record results

The *Project Page*, *4-H Goal Calendar* and *County 4-H Records* are excellent tools for youth to use to record the progress they make. Make sure to let youth know that they are only tools though. If he/she comes up with a more effective method of keeping records then they should implement it.

Ease the mind of members who worry that every portion of their records should be filled out completely. If the questions on a worksheet don't match the goals a young person has set for the project year, it's okay to leave them blank.

Writing is not the only method of completing records. Encourage 4-H members to think about using their computer, an audio tape or video tape to record their progress toward their goals. As a leader, you can help reinforce this by helping them find a record keeping method that best suits them. Ask your county 4-H Extension Educator about some of the NH 4-H Record forms available in an electronic version.

Don't forget to involve parents in the record keeping process. They can offer a wealth of experience upon which young people can draw. Parents also can help monitor their child's progress throughout the year to help determine if goals need adjusting.

Celebrate accomplishments

Once a young person has made progress toward or reached a goal, they should celebrate and be recognized for their work. Recognition need not be large-scale or extensive, but it should be meaningful to the 4-H member. Here are a few tips for recognition of progress toward self-set goals:

- Never hold a contest or a competitive activity to recognize progress toward *self-set* goals.
- The amount of progress will vary with the individual, the goal, the topic. Remember, we are measuring **progress**, not the quantity and/or quality of work.
- The unique growth of a young person is measured against the young person's own plan.
- Giving this type of recognition privately is often most effective.
- Give the recognition after the young person has made progress, but do not hold it out as something to get if you make progress.

Intrinsic recognition (an inner sense of accomplishment) is something the youth should feel for him/herself. It is highly personal and is not given by another person. This type of self-recognition is most likely to lead to self-motivation for a youth to reach a goal and feel rewarded.

Extrinsic recognition is given by a significant person in the life of the young person. This may be intangible (a smile or a word of encouragement from someone) or tangible (a pin or certificate).

Both intrinsic and extrinsic recognition are important parts of the recognition process. Intangible and intrinsic recognition tends to be more effective when recognizing progress toward goals.

Evaluate and make future plans

Evaluating allows young people to look at the relationship between what they accomplished throughout the year and the goals they set at the beginning of the year. After evaluating the past year, it is time to identify new goals for the future.

To help youth in this stage, ask questions like: "As you look back over the past year, which of your goals were you able to accomplish?" "Is there anything about your project that you would change?" "What changes did you make on your project as you went along?" "How do you feel about what you have learned?" "What ideas would you like to build on for next year?"

Questions like these can help youth develop more positive self images as they look back on their accomplishments and growth during the past year.

Adapted from Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa & Recognition in Youth Programs: Helping Young People Grow - National 4-H Council.