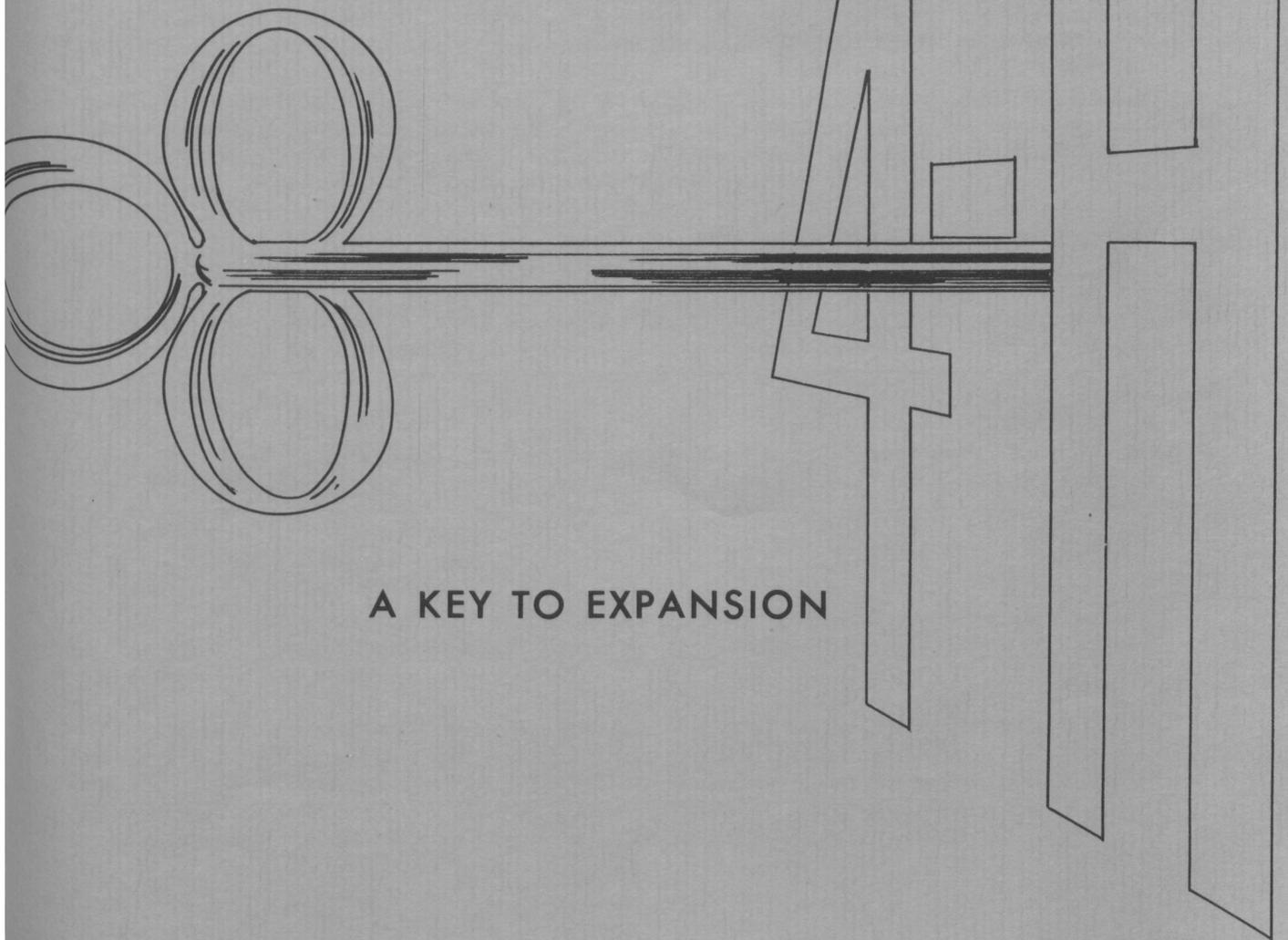


MISSOURI'S GUIDE FOR A

COUNTY 4-H

MEMBERSHIP

COMMITTEE



A KEY TO EXPANSION

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INTRODUCTION

There are more than 700,000 boys and girls of 4-H age in Missouri. Most of them are potential 4-H club members; however, in recent years enrollment has not exceeded 40,000 annually. This is about 5 percent of the total. Of course, most of the 700,000 live in the towns and cities of the state, but a majority of rural counties have less than 15 percent of their potential enrolled and few have more than 20 percent.

Studies show from one-fourth to one-third of the 4-H club age children do not belong to a youth organization. Those who belong to several organizations, including 4-H, do not feel that they are overworked.

This situation presents a challenge to anyone interested in youngsters and their future as useful, respected, and productive citizens. What greater tribute could be paid to an individual than to have it said, "He is busy in the interest of boys and girls, so they may take advantage of the educational opportunities available."

PURPOSE OF COMMITTEE

The County 4-H Membership Committee is a "working committee," not merely a planning or advisory group that takes a few minutes two or three times a year to report what ought to be done. The work of the committee involves planning the meetings and activities necessary to make the work productive. This means various contacts such as personal visits, telephone calls, arranging for and holding meetings, talking to parents, teachers and others. The work does require time and probably some driving within the county. It is an honor to serve as a member of the committee, but the position itself is not honorary.

The specific purpose of the committee is to increase the 4-H club membership of the county by extending to additional boys and girls this educational opportunity and all of its available experiences.

Such a specific purpose does not overlook the value of other youth organizations and clubs. It merely indicates that the 4-H club program can contribute worthwhile opportunities to many more boys and girls. The County 4-H Membership Committee is one way of doing this. Other organizations and clubs may accomplish their goals through similar or entirely different organizational methods.

SUGGESTED PLAN OF OPERATION

To be most effective, the County 4-H Membership Committee should have a long range plan with year to year continuity. The work of the current year is of immediate concern but it also needs to be part of a three to five year plan. The cumulative results of such a plan carried out each year are like compound interest.

There are four logical steps in developing a successful plan to increase 4-H club membership. These are: (1) determine the situation, (2) set county goals, (3) organize clubs, and (4) prevent 4-H dropouts after original enrollment.

Step One - Determine Situation

The end result of determining the situation in a county is to find out who the boys and girls are that may become 4-H members and where they live. Once this is known, then various means can be used to contact them and their parents.

A starting place might be to prepare a county map showing the location of present 4-H clubs and the number of members in each. By dots or colored map pins locate exactly on the map where the members live. Compare the present number of members with the number of boys and girls in the county. The latest census figures on population show the number living in the county by various age groups. Current information can be secured by going directly to the various schools of the county.

Some counties have a County Youth Council or Committee. This group might have previously developed a situation statement and/or survey pertaining to all youth. If so, it would be helpful.

Step Two - Set County Goals

It is important to set county membership goals in the beginning. This helps to provide the stimulus necessary to complete a challenging job. It also serves as a measure in evaluating the success of the committee's efforts, after giving direction and purpose.

Goals should be specific rather than general. This means stating them so they can be measured, for example "five new clubs" instead of "more clubs." They should be realistic or attainable, yet provide a challenge.

Since this is a 4-H Membership Committee the goals established should be related to membership. Examples follow:

1. Organize five new clubs.
2. Secure twenty new members in present clubs.
3. Fifteen percent increase in total enrollment.
4. Do preliminary work in two communities for new clubs next year.

Step Three - Organize New Clubs

If the organization of a new club is to be successful, it must result in a club with community or neighborhood support sufficient to develop a club program and with the responsibility to carry it out, thereby providing an enjoyable educational experience for the members. This suggests that there are some basic requirements that should be accomplished before or during the organization of a club.

The basic requirement easiest to secure is the interest of the boys and girls. This can then be used as a basis to get started.

Parent interest and assistance in organizing a new club is a must. Here lies the success or failure of the new venture. Adult leadership in the club is a necessity and is often listed as the cause of success, or its absence is given as the reason for failure. Parents can provide this leadership or they can cooperate and give active support to some other adult leader who may not be a parent.

The work of informing parents and enlisting their active support, cooperation and assistance is very important. When parents desire a club on behalf of their boys and girls, they will more readily accept leadership responsibilities. Regardless of the method used to organize a club, parent desire, understanding, and support are essential.

There are numerous methods of organizing a 4-H club. Techniques used could include personal visits, phone calls, circular letters, parents' meetings, slide stories, movies, assistance from 4-H Junior Leaders, etc. Perhaps several or all of these would be used by the time a meeting of parents and children was held to officially organize the club.

Four methods of organizing a club are described here. Two or more of these may be combined, or an entirely different method may be used depending upon the situation and circumstances existing in the community.

Method 1 - Parents' Committee

This method starts with the securing of parents' interest and desire and results in the formation of a parents' committee that is responsible (with the guidance and help of the County 4-H Membership Committee) for organizing the club, securing its adult leadership, and developing the club program. This method localizes the interest and provides answers to many questions that an "outsider" could not answer.

A member of the 4-H Membership Committee, an Extension Agent, or someone else has to work closely with the parents and families in the community. This might mean holding a general meeting for the parents before the committee is selected. In this case it would be necessary to provide an interesting program (perhaps a 4-H slide story or a movie) and a discussion session to explain the 4-H club program and its opportunities.

After parental approval is secured and the committee is selected by the parents themselves, another general meeting for both parents and potential members would be called to formally organize the club. In the meantime the leadership required for the anticipated type of club would have been discussed and hopefully secured, or volunteers would be ready to accept the needed leadership roles.

Method 2 - School As Original Contact

The school has been used successfully as an original contact to develop interest among boys and girls and to provide additional information to be used later. The use of this method does not imply that the 4-H club is to be organized within the school or even in connection with it. The school simply is the place where the County 4-H Membership Committee makes its first effort to develop interest. Usually, the school principal is visited and the program is explained to him, then he is asked for an appropriate time at which 4-H club work might be explained to the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades. Often an interested teacher in the school is helpful in arranging a visit with the principal and in getting details worked out.

The school presentation about 4-H clubs should be well planned in advance. A few colored slides are often used to show what 4-H is and what it offers to members. The use of a 4-H member, perhaps a Junior Leader, to give a five minute talk on "What Is 4-H and Why I Enjoy It" arouses interest. It should be made clear that parental interest and support is a must if a club is to be organized.

A "4-H Club Interest Survey" form is given to the potential members with instructions that they take it home, fill it out with their parents, and return it to the school. A suggested survey form appears on the following page.

After the survey forms are returned, the 4-H Membership Committee then has information that will enable it to proceed. At this time it might be appropriate to call a parents' meeting, select a parents' committee, or take whatever other follow-through action seems appropriate in getting a club organized.

Method 3 - Adult Organization Or Group Sponsorship

Some organizations or groups exist specifically in the interest of youth. Others have broader interests but have youth committees to develop and sponsor parts of their total program. Service clubs, (Lions, Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.), P.T.A., churches, Women's Extension Clubs, Sportsman Clubs, etc. are examples of adult organizations that could include as a part of their own program the organization and sponsorship of a 4-H club.

Such a club or organization could perform essentially the same function as a parents' committee does in Method 1. This organization could help promote the 4-H club and either provide the necessary leadership or secure it from among parents of the 4-H members. The County 4-H Membership Committee would participate in both the parents' meetings prior to organization and in the organization meeting. With such an adult organization sponsoring a 4-H club, it should receive the proper recognition and assistance needed for the new club to function. This is a proper role for the County 4-H Membership Committee to assume as well as to give other ideas that would encourage and help the adult organization to continue as a 4-H club sponsor and to promote its program.

Method 4 - Existing 4 - H Clubs

Existing 4-H clubs can be responsible for the organization of new clubs. This has been done; therefore, it should be considered as another method. It is usually the well established clubs with an outstanding record of achievements that assume such responsibility. This is an excellent role for Junior Leaders who have chosen "organization" as their phase of junior leadership.

4 - H CLUB INTEREST SURVEY

1. NAME _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____

2. STREET OR ROUTE _____ PHONE _____

3. CITY OR TOWN _____ BOY _____ GIRL _____

4. PARENT'S NAME _____

5. SCHOOL THAT YOU ATTEND _____ GRADE _____

6. WHAT YOUTH GROUPS DO YOU BELONG TO NOW?

a. _____ c. _____

b. _____ d. _____

7. WOULD YOU LIKE TO BELONG TO A 4-H CLUB WITH BOYS & GIRLS YOUR OWN AGE?

YES _____ NO _____

8. WHAT TIME IS BEST FOR YOU AND YOUR PARENTS TO ATTEND A MEETING TO LEARN MORE ABOUT 4-H CLUB WORK?

a. NIGHT _____
(Indicate what night of the week)

b. AFTERNOON _____
(What day of week - immediately after school)

c. SATURDAY _____
(Morning or afternoon)

9. IF YOU JOINED A 4-H CLUB, WHAT WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT? (CHECK TWO ITEMS)

- _____ Food for Family & Friends
- _____ Making Clothing
- _____ Growing Flowers
- _____ Woodwork
- _____ Small Engines
- _____ Electricity
- _____ Horsemanship
- _____ Camping
- _____ Citizenship
- _____ Better Grooming
- _____ Insect Collecting
- _____ Nature & Outdoorsman

- _____ Bicycle Care & Repair
- _____ Growing Vegetables & Fruits
- _____ Caring for Animals & Pets
- _____ Decorating A Room
- _____ Caring for the Lawn
- _____ Arranging Flowers
- _____ Recreation
- _____ Knitting
- _____ Health
- _____ Every Day Courtesies
- _____ Child Care and Baby Sitting
- _____ Crafts or Handicraft

10. TO THE PARENTS -- WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO WORK WITH A SMALL GROUP OF BOYS AND GIRLS HELPING THEM LEARN SKILLS IN ONE OF THE ABOVE?

YES _____ NO _____

The County 4-H Membership Committee can use this method and involve others along with its own members. The committee could lend support to this method by setting up incentives so that clubs responsible for the organization of a new club would be properly recognized and rewarded. A summer picnic or party, a club trip or tour to an interesting educational sight or event could be provided.

This method should not be considered as one by which the County 4-H Membership Committee can get new clubs organized entirely by the efforts of others. Some existing clubs can do the job alone but others need guidance and assistance. The committee might get information from clubs as to where new clubs are a possibility and some indication of the potential leadership. It would then be necessary to follow through using Method 1 as a means of getting the new club organized.

PREVENT 4-H DROPOUTS

The addition of new clubs each year does not guarantee a net increase in enrollment. The new members added must first replace those that drop out before an increase occurs; therefore, it is important to re-enroll the present members. Of course, all older members will eventually drop out because of other outside interests, work, or because they reach the age limit. The greatest problem is keeping the younger members interested and wanting to continue.

There are two times when dropouts are most common. One of these is during the first year of membership or before they enroll the second year. The other is when the members reach 14 years of age and enter high school. The causes of these two periods of highest dropout are probably somewhat different. Failure to enjoy the first year's work, referred to as "lack of interest," is often given as a reason for not enrolling for the second year. Lack of time and other new interests are given as the reasons for the dropout at 14 years of age.

It is not uncommon for an entire club to drop out. This most often occurs when a leader moves out of the community or is unable to continue as a leader. In these situations lack of leadership is given as the reason. On the surface this seems to be a valid reason. But in most cases it is not true. The real reason may be that new leadership has not been recruited and trained or that parental support has not been secured. When parents are concerned and want their boys and girls to enjoy the benefits of 4-H, leadership emerges and the club continues. "Where there's a will, there's a way."

This is only to say that a County 4-H Membership Committee is most effective in increasing the number of boys and girls receiving the benefits of 4-H membership, when it pays attention to keeping members enrolled as well as organizing new clubs.

INCREASING MEMBERSHIP OF EXISTING CLUBS

Providing an interesting program with plenty of variety will not only keep boys and girls from dropping out, but it will encourage others to join. However, many boys and girls are somewhat shy and will not ask to join a 4-H club. County 4-H Membership Committees can encourage each club to have its own membership committee and to be active in calling on all children and their parents, inviting them to join the club. Club membership committees should not stop with just one call to prospective members, but should make several calls. They can leave some of the promotional leaflets at the homes of those called on. Examples of such leaflets can be found in the references at the back of this publication. Joining a 4-H club usually occurs in three stages. First, prospective members and parents have to be informed about the value of 4-H. Second, they need to become concerned about the opportunities it provides for children. Third, if informed and concerned, parents will probably encourage their boys and girls to become members.

HELPFUL HINTS

The best plan for increasing membership has many approaches. Action taken should always open doors to new and different opportunities rather than to limit them. Following are a few ideas that increase opportunities for membership growth:

1. Small clubs of five to eight members, made up of three to six families, have advantages over larger clubs in some situations. Less leadership is needed, transportation problems are fewer, and meetings may be held in homes.
2. Two clubs of perhaps 15 members each may be more appropriate than one large club in some communities. Clubs can get too large for the available facilities, travel distance, or leadership available.
3. 4-H Alumni are an excellent source of leadership and have knowledge of what 4-H clubs offer. Many alumni feel that they owe some of their talents to the program that was so satisfying and worthwhile to them.
4. Boys and girls enrolled in the junior leadership project are looking for opportunities to develop their leadership abilities. They can be helped by having opportunities presented to them which will assist them to meet their project requirements and develop leadership skills.
5. Parental support is not only very valuable, but is also essential in successful clubs: from it comes leadership. Time and effort used in developing parental understanding is always well spent.
6. Good publicity can result in public acceptance of an idea and makes success much easier. This means that newspapers, radio, and TV stations can help to keep the public informed and lend support. It is important to keep the news media informed.

References (Available through your County University Extension Center)

1. Folder 128 - "Parents Are Partners In 4-H" - Extension Division
2. Folder 129 - "4-H Parent Committees" - Extension Division
3. Folder 132 - "Chippy Says" - Extension Division
4. Folder 143 - "4-H For All" - Extension Division
5. Folder 155 - "Join A 4-H Club" - Extension Division
6. PA-526 - "This Is 4-H" - USDA Publication



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