

## 4-H VOLUNTEER ROLES

Volunteers work with Extension professionals in fulfilling several general yet important roles in managing Ohio 4-H youth development programs. These include:

- # teaching and sharing information with 4-H members and their families,
- # teaching and sharing information with other 4-H volunteers,
- # providing logistical support (e.g., organizing events and activities, conducting meetings, providing transportation, etc.),
- # providing clerical support (e.g., writing newsletters, answering telephones, answering questions and requests for information, etc.),
- # developing new resources (i.e. identifying and cultivating potential 4-H sponsors and donors),
- # allocating existing resources (i.e. administering budgets, recommending spending priorities, etc.),
- # assisting with administrative responsibilities (e.g., completing reports, making promotional presentations, etc.),
- # developing programs (e.g., identifying needs, establishing objectives, identifying strategies, securing resources, conducting evaluations, and reporting results), and
- # assisting with future and strategic planning (i.e., identifying future needs, recognizing emerging trends, establishing long-range goals, etc.).

In examining these general roles, the important word to remember is partnerships. In many youth organizations, a “top-down” philosophy is followed in which professionals at the “top” of the organizational pyramid are perceived to “control” the functions of middle managers and other volunteers who, in turn, “control” the activities of youth and their parents.

However, Ohio 4-H emphasizes a “bottom-up” philosophy that places youth and their parents in a position of foremost importance in the organization. Professionals function to “uplift” and support middle managers and other volunteers as they, in turn, support young people and their parents with 4-H educational programs. Indeed, Extension professionals and 4-H volunteers must develop strong partnerships, based upon mutual respect and trust, if 4-H is to continue to be the premier non-formal youth development organization in Ohio.

# TYPES OF OHIO 4-H VOLUNTEERS

1. A club advisor is any individual who works with a 4-H community or project club that involves two or more youth who meet regularly to conduct club business, plan the club program, and enroll individually or as a group in one or more 4-H projects. More specifically, there are three types of 4-H club advisors. An **organizational advisor** serves as the primary communications and information liaison between the county 4-H professional and the club's members, their parents, and other advisors in the club. A **project advisor** assists 4-H members with their projects. An **activity advisor** works with members in planning and conducting club activities. However, all of these advisors work together as a team in supporting the members of a 4-H club and their parents.
2. A middle manager is any individual who serves in a coordination role between professional Extension staff and other volunteers, parents, or members. There are three types of 4-H middle managers: **key leaders** who serve as experts in particular subject matter areas or with specific activities and events; **master volunteers** who teach subject matter to other volunteers or parents; and **committee members** who contribute time, energies, talents to assist the 4-H program or professional staff in planning, conducting and evaluating county 4-H educational programs.
3. A school enrichment volunteer is any individual (including a classroom teacher) who works with a short-term 4-H program, offered during regular school hours, to enrich the formal classroom curriculum. A school enrichment program focuses on hands-on experiences, provides real life applications of knowledge gained, increases member understandings of difficult concepts, and encourages the development of student members as young adults.
4. A special emphasis volunteer is any individual who works with a short-term 4-H group to offer a series of hands-on activities designed to meet the interests and needs of the youth within their community. This is the most flexible of the 4-H groups, because it can be offered to various numbers of young people in a variety of settings and on a multitude of topics. In many communities, 4-H special emphasis groups meet in schools, community centers, or churches. They focus on one or more topics through activities such as after-school programs, juvenile diversion programs, sports clinics, etc. Special emphasis groups can also be organized by individual volunteers as small, informal gatherings that meet in homes or local businesses. These groups typically attract youth from surrounding 4-H clubs or within community by focusing on a particular area of speciality, such as woodworking, aquariums, cultural arts, foods, clowning, photography, computers, etc.
5. A youth volunteer is any young person with the emotional maturity and leadership ability necessary to function in any of the following volunteer roles, i.e., Teen Leader Club Officer, Camp Counselor, Jr. Fair Board Superintendent or Dept. Assistant, Awareness Team, Sandwich Stand Chair or Day Chair, 4-H Advisory Council, etc.