

Making the Best4-HClub Betters

Club Constitution and By-laws

Intended Audience

- 4-H club members

Lesson Objectives

Club members and parents will:

- Learn what's in the club constitution.
- Participate in writing relevant and practical club by-laws.

Time: 20 minutes

Equipment and supplies

- Pencils
- Easel paper
- Masking tape
- Markers
- Resource:
 - *Approve and Review 4-H Club By-Laws Checklist*
- Handouts:
 - Club Constitution template
 - Club Constitution Word Scramble/Answer Key
 - Club By-Laws template

Do ahead

- Review the lesson and the Club Constitution and By- Laws templates. Give some thought to possible by-law "rules" that you think your club should consider.
- Gather equipment and supplies.
- Copy handouts, one per member.

BACKGROUND

The constitution is one of several important building blocks for a successful 4-H club. In 2013, Ohio 4-H and the IRS agreed on a template that spells out the requirements for an Ohio 4-H club. The template allows little room for individual club rules (those belong in the club's by-laws). The constitution is required and must be approved by club members, signed by the organizational advisor and club president, and submitted to the county Extension office. The constitution template can be found at: <https://ohio4h.org/volunteers/volunteers/club-leaders/ohio-4-h-volunteer-handbook> .

Club by-laws are optional. Individual club guidelines, or rules, can be included in the by-laws. Ohio 4-H also provides a template for these, which can be edited to meet your club's needs. By-laws should be relevant and practical, identifying both rules and consequences. The by-laws template can be found at: <https://ohio4h.org/volunteers/volunteers/club-leaders/ohio-4-h-volunteer-handbook>

WHAT TO DO

Activity 1: Club Constitution Word Scramble - It's important for members to know what's in their constitution. It is part of the club's foundation, and any by-laws that members write must not conflict with the constitution. So, what does the constitution say? Send your members on a hunt for answers, and ask them to unscramble the boxed letters for an important 4-H message. Approve the constitution for your club, if this hasn't already been done. File a signed copy at the Extension Office, and be sure to give a copy to new members.

Activity 2: Developing Club By-Laws - What should be included in your club's by-laws? Tape some easel paper to the walls. Label each sheet with one of the following by-law categories or "articles": Membership, Meetings, Policies, Officers, Committees, and Other. Lead a discussion, and ask members to list rules that might be included in each article, answering questions like the following: Will our club include Cloverbud members? Do we have a limit on how many members we accept? If so, what's the limit? How many meetings should our club have? When? Where? How many of these must a member attend? Who do they call in advance to be excused? What are valid excuses? Should we be that specific? What happens if a member doesn't attend enough meetings? Should we charge dues? What for? How much? In addition to the



Sources

<https://ohio4h.org/volunteers/volunteers/club-leaders/ohio-4-h-volunteer-handbook>

four offices (president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer), what officers should we elect? What will they do? At which meeting should we hold the election? What happens if one of our officers quits or moves away? What committees should we have? Are these standing (permanent) or ad hoc (temporary) committees? How many projects must a member complete each year to remain active? Are there any restrictions on the number of projects a member may take? What happens if a member doesn't complete a project? Will our club do a community service project every year?

Activity 3: Next Steps - In a small club, you may be able to reach consensus regarding each rule or procedure. In a larger club, you may need to vote. The club president, an older teen, or an advisor can lead this process. The discussion leader should appoint an ad hoc committee to write a draft set of by-laws before the club's next meeting, using the rules decided on by the group. Ask them to use the *Approve and Review 4-H Club By-Laws Checklist* to guide their work.

Discuss and vote on the proposed club by-laws at the club's next meeting. Make sure each member receives a copy of the by-laws as approved. Plan to review these every year, and always give a copy of the current by-laws to new members as they join. File a copy at the Extension Office, as well.

TALK IT OVER

Reflect

- Why would every 4-H club's constitution need to include the same information?
- Why would every 4-H club's by-laws be unique?
- Why would club members want to review and update the club's by-laws every year?

Apply

- What other clubs or groups are you in that have a constitution and/or by-laws? Are these available to every member? Should they be? Are they always followed? Why or why not? Should they be?
- The United States has a Constitution. How can it be changed if needed?

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