

Tab 1



Accommodations Event Guide

What is the 4-H Accommodations Event Guide?

This 4-H Accommodations Event Guide is designed to ensure 4-H programs are inclusive and accessible to all youth, particularly those with disabilities. Think of it as a playbook for "universal design" in youth development. It provides staff, volunteers, and parents with strategies to modify activities so every child—regardless of physical, sensory, or cognitive differences—can fully participate in 4-H projects, programs, meetings, and competitions.



Why Does Making Accommodations Matter?

[The Americans with Disabilities Act](#) requires that people with disabilities be provided "reasonable" accommodations and prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities. Accommodations minimize barriers to individuals so they can participate. Accommodations are generally considered reasonable if they do not change the overall nature of the program, alter the essential components for participation, pose undue financial or administrative burden, or put anyone at risk. Accommodations that meet these standards should typically be provided whenever possible.

How to Use the 4-H Accommodations Event Guide

This guide provides examples of accommodations to improve engagement in 4-H experiences. This is a starting place to explore possibilities. When providing accommodations, recognize that all individuals are unique, so all accommodations must be tailored to each person's unique needs. Also, even though we may make accommodations based on the needs of one or a few individuals, they often benefit all participants. As you prepare for conversations about making accommodations, be sure to review [Important Considerations for Discussing the Equity of Accommodations](#).

Authors

Authors:

Darcy Cole, Program Specialist, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Jacob Halper, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Betsy Olson Minnaert, former Program Specialist, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Molly Goin, former Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Reviewers:

Karen Beranek, Quality 4-H Programs & Systems Specialist, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Jenny Cable, Curriculum Project Coordinator, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Amber Greeley, Director of State and County Fairs Programs, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Rebecca Harrington, Director of Operations & Systems, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Stacy Johnson, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Todd Merhkens, Academic Technologist, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Nicole Pokorney, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Department of Youth Development

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Accommodations Event Guide..... | 1 |
| What is the 4-H Accommodations Event Guide?..... | 1 |
| Why Does Making Accommodations Matter?..... | 1 |
| How to Use the 4-H Accommodations Event Guide..... | 1 |
| Authors..... | 2 |
| Table of Contents..... | 3 |
| Considerations When Making Accommodations..... | 4 |
| Using Universal Design to Increase Accessibility for All..... | 4 |
| STEP Process for Making Accommodations..... | 8 |
| Accommodations Considerations..... | 9 |
| General Accommodations Based on Type of Disability..... | 10 |
| Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)..... | 10 |
| Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)..... | 10 |
| Sensory Disabilities..... | 11 |
| Intellectual Disabilities..... | 11 |
| Learning Disabilities..... | 11 |
| Emotional and Behavioral Disorders..... | 12 |
| Physical Impairments..... | 12 |
| Health Disorders..... | 12 |
| Specific Event Accommodations..... | 13 |
| Day Camps/Project Workshops..... | 13 |
| 4-H Overnight Camps..... | 13 |
| Showcase Events..... | 17 |
| Meetings..... | 21 |
| 4-H Ambassador Events, Trainings and Meetings..... | 23 |
| Shooting Sports..... | 26 |
| Virtual Opportunities..... | 26 |
| Travel Events (National Trips, Exchanges)..... | 28 |
| Program Agreement and After School Programs..... | 29 |
| 4-H Online/Fair Entry Registration Processes..... | 30 |

Considerations When Making Accommodations

Planning ahead ensures 4-H experiences are successful and welcoming to everyone. It's essential to consider the demands (physical, visual, task completion, etc.) of the event or activity and have conversations with individuals and/or caregivers. Utilize the [Conversations with Individuals and Caregivers](#) to frame your conversations.

Use the [University of Minnesota's Disability Resource Center's Guide for Creating Accessible and Inclusive Meetings or Events](#) and [Minnesota 4-H Facility Accessibility Checklist](#) to make 4-H experiences accessible and welcoming.

Staff and Volunteers

Training on assuming competence, disability etiquette (for example, confidentiality), positive behavior management, and clearly communicating the goal of inclusion to all involved is critical to creating an inclusive environment.

Families

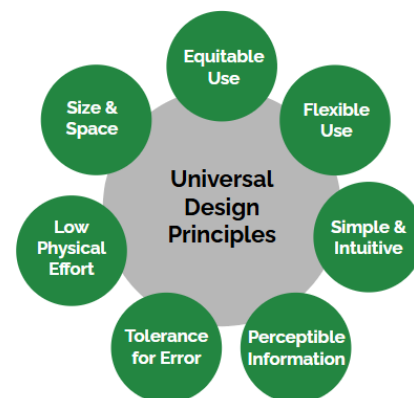
In order for all families to feel like an event would be a safe and productive place for their young person, have an open dialogue with them before the event.

Activities

Many of the quality program practices we use, such as offering youth choice, providing a variety of types of learning and interaction, supporting social interaction among youth, and setting up predictable patterns/schedules, serve all youth, including youth with disabilities.

Using Universal Design to Increase Accessibility for All

Universal Design in youth development means creating programs that work for all young people from the start, regardless of ability, background, or learning style. It includes offering multiple ways to participate, learn, and express themselves, along with ensuring environments are physically, socially, and emotionally accessible. The goal is to reduce barriers and increase belonging so every young person can engage meaningfully. [Universal Design \(UD\)](#)



[principles](#) aim to create products, environments, and programs that are as usable as possible for all people, regardless of age, ability, or circumstance. This means designing for a wide range of individuals, minimizing the need for adaptations or specialized designs. The seven principles of Universal Design include:

1. Equitable Use: The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
 - Guidelines:
 - Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
 - Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
 - Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users.
 - Make the design appealing to all users.
 - Examples:
 - Power doors with sensors at entrances are convenient for all users.
 - Provide integrated, dispersed, and adaptable seating.
2. Flexibility Use: The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
 - Guidelines:
 - Provide choice in methods of use.
 - Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.
 - Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
 - Provide adaptability to the user's pace.
 - Examples:
 - Offer scissors designed for right-or left-handed users
 - Have multiple types and varieties of writing utensils available.
3. Simple and Intuitive: Design use is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
 - Guidelines:
 - Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
 - Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.
 - Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.
 - Arrange information consistent with its importance.
 - Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.
 - Examples:
 - A moving sidewalk, elevator, or escalator in a public space.
 - An instruction manual with drawings and no text.

4. **Perceptible Information:** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
 - **Guidelines:**
 - Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) to explain essential information.
 - Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
 - Maximize the understandability of essential information.
 - Differentiate elements in ways that can be clearly described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
 - Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.
 - **Examples:**
 - Use tactile, visual, and audible cues and instructions.
 - Utilize redundant cueing (e.g., voice communications and visuals).
5. **Tolerance for Error:** The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
 - **Guidelines:**
 - Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors - think about: most commonly used items, most accessed, and reduce hazardous items.
 - Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
 - Provide fail-safe features.
 - Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require concentration
 - **Examples:**
 - Use safety locks to prevent access to dangerous items.
 - Provide an "undo" feature in computer software that allows the user to correct mistakes without penalty.
6. **Low Physical Effort:** The design can be used efficiently and comfortably with minimum fatigue.
 - **Guidelines:**
 - Tasks allow the user to maintain a neutral body position.
 - Use reasonable operating forces.
 - Minimize repetitive actions.
 - Minimize sustained physical effort.
 - **Examples:**

- Incorporate lever or loop handles on doors and faucets.
 - Provide touch lamps operated without a switch.
7. Size and Space for Approach and Use: Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.
- Guidelines:
 - Provide a clear line of sight to important items for any seated or standing user.
 - Make the reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
 - Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
 - Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.
 - Examples:
 - Knobs and dials on the front and clear floor space around appliances, mailboxes, dumpsters, and other elements.
 - Widen the walkways or space between rows to accommodate all users.

Some strategies to implement include:

- Accessible Venues: Choose venues with accessible entrances, ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and clear pathways. Use the [4-H Facility Accessibility Checklist](#) to assess facility accessibility and explore potential solutions to overcome accessibility challenges.
- Communication: Provide clear and accessible communication, including assistive listening devices, ASL interpreters, microphones, and captioning for presentations and videos. American Sign Language Interpreter - Contact U of MN Interpreting Captioning Unit (icu@umn.edu) to request an interpreter. Use visuals such as schedules, timers, social stories, etc., and post group agreements and expectations.
- Physical Accessibility: Offer accessible seating, various table options, and ensure adequate lighting.
- Visual Accessibility: Use large fonts, high contrast, etc., in presentations and materials to ensure digital accessibility for online offerings..
- Sensory Considerations: [Provide quiet rooms or sensory spaces](#).
- Review enrollment health information for food allergy information. Ask about dietary needs as a part of all registrations. As requested, plan for gluten-free, dairy-free, vegetarian, vegan, kosher, and halal options. Label food clearly.

- Program Materials: Provide materials in advance, in various formats (large print, Braille, digital), and with clear instructions on physical activity levels and demands.
- Facilitator and Volunteer Considerations: Provide training on [Disability Etiquette](#) and best practices to all facilitators and volunteers who will support 4-H activities.
- Responsive Planning: Regularly review and update accessibility plans based on feedback from attendees.
- Accommodation Resources: Make [accommodation tools](#) available at all times for all participants.
- Intentionally Plan Support Systems: Establish networks of support for individuals with disabilities, such as peer support and mentorship.

STEP Process for Making Accommodations

Focusing on four specific areas, including space, tasks, equipment, and people (STEP), within an activity or event can help think through simple changes that can be made to make programming more inclusive.

1. Space - What changes to the physical space would help everyone be able to participate?
2. Tasks - What tasks make this activity or event difficult? Can changes be made to these?
3. Equipment - What changes could be made to the items we use to complete the activity or during the event?
4. People - What training do people need to make changes? What changes can we make to how people interact at the activity or event to make it more inclusive?

The following example utilizes the STEP process and framework to identify changes that could be made to an event, such as the 4-H Food Revue, to ensure participants have an inclusive experience:

- Space
 - Provide tables of adjustable heights.
 - Provide a variety of seating options.
- Tasks
 - Allow participants to submit visual or audio recipes.
 - Schedule participants for less waiting.
- Equipment
 - Use visual timers to keep the judge on schedule.

- Provide a calming space for participants who need it.
- People
 - Work with the judge to prepare them for working with youth with disabilities.
 - Provide families with a social story they can use to prepare.

Accommodations Considerations

Below is a checklist of recommended items for all 4-H events:

Marketing

- Provide the link to the [4-H Accommodations Request Form](#) or a [Participant Information Sheet](#).
- Use the recommended accommodations request wording: "If you, or a 4-H participant, need disability-related or other accommodations to participate in this program or have questions about the physical accessibility of the event location, please contact _____ (list name and phone number of the local Extension office and program contact) at registration or at least 2 weeks prior to the program or event. Late notice may limit our ability to provide requested accommodations."

Planning

- Select an ADA-accessible location.
- Develop and distribute a [social story](#). Social stories model appropriate social interaction by describing a situation with relevant social cues, others' perspectives, and suggested appropriate responses. The two examples do not include pictures because it is recommended that personalized pictures be used to best prepare the youth for the situation that they might encounter. Insert your own photos to show youth in your club what to expect.
- Offer registration options in multiple formats (e.g., online, paper registration forms, calling or stopping into the Extension Office for help registering) and always add contact information for more information or assistance.
- Share agenda/plan ahead of time with families, with physical demands, environment details, etc.
- Design activities for multiple learning styles, incorporating youth choice and individual and group activities.

Set Up

- Offer a variety of seating options

- Ensure aisles are wide enough to accommodate all participants.
- Set up a calming or sensory space, if possible.

During the Event

- Use a visual timer.
- Have a variety of fidgets available.
- Use a visual schedule.
- Bring an accommodations kit and make adaptive equipment available.

After the Event

- Ask families to provide feedback on your event in multiple formats.

General Accommodations Based on Type of Disability

The ADA defines a person with a disability as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Below is a sampling of some general accommodations that might be helpful based on the type of disability.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects a person's executive function. People with ADHD may experience difficulty focusing attention, display hyperactive behaviors, and struggle with impulse control. ADHD can impact all aspects of a person's life, including academic/professional, home life, and interpersonal relationships.

Accommodations that could be helpful:

- Visual schedules/examples
- Flexible seating
- Quiet workspaces
- Extra time
- Broken down tasks

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is displayed early in childhood and continues throughout a person's life. ASD presents difficulties with social interaction and communication, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. People with Autism Spectrum Disorder may have a variety of sensory needs.

Accommodations that could be helpful:

- Visual schedules/examples
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Calming break space
- Fidgets
- Flexible seating arrangements

Sensory Disabilities

Sensory disabilities are disabilities in which the senses impact how we take in sensory information and interact with the world.

Accommodations that could be helpful:

- Seating accommodations
- Quiet or sensory areas
- Earplugs or noise-canceling headphones
- Lighting covers or sunglasses

Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disabilities are disabilities in which intellectual abilities are significantly below average. Individuals with cognitive disabilities have difficulty with adaptive behaviors such as safety, hygiene, and other life skills. Examples of cognitive disabilities would include Down Syndrome and Fragile X syndrome.

Accommodations that could be helpful:

- Visual schedules/examples
- Task modification
- Visual aids
- Extra time

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are disabilities when someone has a disorder in one or more areas of the psychological processing of information. This disability affects individuals abilities to read, write, calculate, spell, or think. Examples of learning disabilities include dyslexia, dyscalculia, and aphasia.

Accommodations that could be helpful:

- Extra time to complete a task

- Choices in ways to display learning
- “Buddy” system (pairing older youth with younger youth, peer, or adult to help with difficult tasks)
- Materials being read aloud

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders affect the way a person interacts and forms relationships, and impacts their ability to regulate emotions. Examples of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders include anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder.

Accommodations that could be helpful:

- Calming break space
- Structured environment with visual schedules
- Sensory supports, such as noise-cancelling headphones
- Behavior supports

Physical Impairments

Physical Impairments are either congenital or acquired impairments that affect the person's ability to move within their surroundings. People with physical disabilities will sometimes utilize mobility equipment such as wheelchairs or walkers to help navigate their surroundings.

Accommodations that could be helpful:

- Use ADA accessible facilities
- Options for sitting if standing for long periods of time
- Adapted supplies (Scissors, golf pencils, triangular crayons, etc.)
- American Sign Language Interpreter - Contact U of MN Interpreting Captioning Unit (icu@umn.edu) to request an interpreter. Requests appreciated at least two weeks before the date needed.

Health Disorders

These disorders are functional abnormalities that disrupt normal body functions and can include autoimmune diseases, allergies, and asthma.

Accommodations that could be helpful:

- Availability of snacks and water
- Access to allergen-free foods
- Separate spaces free of allergens for food prep

- Access to seating

References:

- Centers For Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, December 12). Disability and Health Overview. Disability and Health.
<https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/about/index.html>

Specific Event Accommodations

The goal of making accommodations is not perfection; the goal is to reduce barriers so all youth who wish to participate can.

Day Camps/Project Workshops¹

Day camps and complex day-long events like project workshops often take a bit more planning and support to increase inclusion.

Here are a few tips:

- Provide a social story on the event on the registration page.
- Use visual schedules.
- Prepare an intake form or list of questions to send to registrants who have indicated a disability at the time of registration to demonstrate you are interested in learning more about the strengths as well as the needed supports for that person.
- Communicate honestly and positively. Consider creative solutions to help support youth.

For day camps and project workshop days, you are likely to have more transitions than in some other types of 4-H programs. Use a [visual schedule](#) to make those transitions predictable and orderly. Are there visual representations you can share with youth to let them know when transitions are coming up? Can you create some routines that can be followed during every transition?

4-H Overnight Camps

4-H camp offers youth meaningful opportunities to build relationships, try new things, and learn through fun. However, it can also create anxiety—especially for

¹ Standards for Inclusive Recreation Programs. (n.d.). Retrieved March 4, 2026, from <https://www.inclusionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Standards-List-updated-9.22.pdf>

families of youth with disabilities. Take practical steps to create an overnight camp experience that emphasizes inclusion and belonging for all youth.

Camp Marketing

Market camps so families of youth with disabilities know that 4-H camps are inclusive and prepared to support their child. Make inclusivity a core message in all outreach materials.

Inclusivity should be a core message in all outreach. In both word-of-mouth and written materials, “inclusive” should be as central as “project” or even “fun.” When inclusion is consistently highlighted as a key benefit, it signals clearly that camp is a welcoming place for youth with disabilities.²

Consider this Scenario:

A parent asks if their child can leave and return each day because they're not comfortable with overnight stays. Is staying overnight truly essential to the camp experience?

Start with a genuine conversation to understand the family's concerns. In some cases, allowing a camper to attend during the day may be a reasonable accommodation—one that opens the door to an experience they might otherwise miss. Another option, if space and policies allow, is permitting a caregiver to stay overnight with the youth.

Finally, collaborate. Don't hesitate to connect with other 4-H staff to find solutions that balance program goals with individual needs.

Getting Youth Involved

Staff cannot always predict camper needs, so tools like a [Participant Information Sheet](#) allow families to share important details while maintaining confidentiality.

Flexibility is key. The counselor experience begins with the application process. Offering multiple ways to apply (written, verbal, video) increases accessibility. A strong counselor team reflects diverse personalities, energy levels, and strengths, ensuring all campers feel represented and supported. Clearly defined

² Siperstein, Gary N. 2023. *Best Practices for Inclusive Camps*.

roles—including unique or support-based positions—help counselors find where they can succeed.³

Training should model inclusivity. Counselors often replicate what they experience, so demonstrating inclusive practices embeds those values into camp. While counselors are responsible for leading and ensuring campers are getting a high-quality camp experience, it is important for staff to remember counselors are learners as well.⁴

Routine and Transitions

Camp disrupts familiar routines, which can lead to uncertainty or stress. Establishing a clear, temporary, and predictable routine helps ease this transition. Use drop-off time for orientation, to introduce key staff (like counselors or nurses), and to clearly explain how youth can connect with guardians if needed. Use [Camp Social Stories](#) to introduce visuals of the space before arriving, encouraging families to build comfort before arriving.

Core Camp Elements

Designing camp with universal inclusion in mind benefits all participants:

- **Meals:** Provide diverse and safe options, with clear communication around dietary needs.
- **Space:** Ensure accessibility, transportation options, and designated sensory or calming areas.
- **Small Groups:** Small groups are a key part of camp where youth build relationships and develop skills. They offer strong opportunities for inclusive practices, especially when youth with disabilities feel safe, supported, and connected early to their group and counselor. Intentional time spent on icebreakers and relationship-building helps create group identity and belonging. When groups work together to ensure all members have meaningful roles—such as adapting activities for a youth using a wheelchair—everyone contributes to shared success. These early connections lay the foundation for positive participation in larger camp experiences.⁵ It is important to share enough information with small group counselors to set up the group for success, while maintaining confidentiality. Consider adding an additional counselor for extra support, or pairing

³ See 1.1 on page 9 of *Best Practices for Inclusive Camps*.

⁴  Camp Counselor Quick Reference Guide Template

⁵ See D.3 on page 62 of *Best Practices for Inclusive Camps*.

experienced campers with new campers or those with disabilities for extra support.

- **Large Group Activities:** Large group settings can feel like organized chaos, so intentional inclusivity is essential. Ensure spaces are accessible and activities offer a variety of roles, allowing all youth to participate meaningfully regardless of ability.

Cabins and Overnight Experience

Sleeping arrangements can be a major concern. Early orientation to cabins, routines, and staff helps youth feel secure. Clear expectations around bedtime, hygiene, and supervision are essential. If needed, have counselors do a walkthrough with campers at the beginning of camp. In some cases, allowing a camper to attend during the day may be a reasonable accommodation, or another option, if space and policies allow, is permitting a caregiver to stay overnight with the youth.

Camp Scenario With Accommodations

It is the first large group gathering right after drop-off, and the room is already buzzing with the excitement of all the campers and counselors talking. A camp counselor gets on stage and uses the microphone to be heard over the already-present noise. They loudly ask, "Who's excited for camp?" to boost energy, but it can overwhelm youth with sensory sensitivities and reinforce the idea that loudness equals excitement. Alternatives should start by setting a more inclusive baseline by allowing different ways to express energy. For example, use a visual excitement scale so youth can show how they feel, and offer multiple response options like raising a hand, standing, moving around the room, or using a bell or buzzer. Have earplugs or headphones readily available, and make sure all youth know they can step into another space for a sensory break at the beginning of all large group gatherings.

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways

Camp is both exciting and anxiety-inducing for many youth. Clear routines, flexible accommodations, and strong communication with families are essential. By prioritizing universal design and multiple ways to participate, camps can create an environment where all youth—regardless of ability—can thrive and enjoy the experience.

Additional Resources:

Check out these additional resources that may be helpful for you in designing your camp!

- [Children's Minnesota: Camps for Kids with Special Needs](#)
- [True Friends Camps \(MN\)](#)
- [Autism Society of Minnesota Summer Camps](#)
- [How to Set up Your Kid for Success](#)

Showcase Events

In 4-H, Showcase Judging includes both conference or interview judging and evaluation of the exhibit the youth created. This can occur at a county or state fair or through other judging events. It is a developmental process where youth present their exhibits to an expert for evaluation. What makes 4-H judging unique is that 4-H judging prioritizes the learning process and the growth of the individual, not just the completed project. Review [Judging Tips for Supporting Youth with Disabilities](#) for more information on how you can help 4-H'ers have the best experience possible.

Remember that just because a youth's engagement doesn't look like you expect, it doesn't mean they're not engaged and trying their best. Not making eye contact, fidgeting, being distracted, not answering questions, or providing short answers when you expect more doesn't equal a poor judging experience. There may be many reasons for the behavior, some of which you may or may not know about. Be flexible, patient, understanding, and fair to each 4-H'er, and remember that just attending judging can be extremely overwhelming.

Remember to proactively ask families ahead of time if there are any special considerations or accommodation needs. Then, this share accommodation request information with those who will support the 4-H'er (judges, project superintendents, volunteers, etc.). Sharing the information is just as important as collecting it from families. See the 4-H Online/Fair Entry Registration Processes section of this document for more information.

Judging

When judging, consider what is developmentally appropriate for each 4-H'er. Focus more on ability level than grade level. Some 4-H'ers may not be able to verbally answer all of the questions you ask them. They may need to support or augment their verbal communication by showing you pictures, pointing to things, showing a

video, sharing something they wrote, or using a communication device. For some youth, open-ended questions are overwhelming, so offering a forced choice (yes or no, this or that, etc.) helps them succeed in the conversation. Regardless of how they communicate with you, view it as an opportunity for them to grow and showcase their learning in their own unique way.

Judge Training

Training 4-H judges specifically to work with youth with disabilities is vital for ensuring the program's mission of "making the best better" remains inclusive and equitable. When a judge is untrained, they may inadvertently focus on the disability rather than the exhibit, or set expectations that don't account for different learning styles and ability levels. Best practice is that 4-H staff share the [Minnesota 4-H Supporting Youth with Disabilities in 4-H Judging online training videos](#) before any showcase events.

A trained judge helps youth feel seen and valued. They prevent the "disability" from being the focal point of the interview, allowing the youth's hard work on their photography, livestock, or woodworking exhibit to shine through. This builds the confidence and "sparks" that are central to the 4-H experience.

Judging Questions

4-H'ers with disabilities may not process questions in the same way as their peers. When a 4-H'er doesn't seem to be answering the questions you're asking or answering with shorter or different answers than you're expecting, try asking creative follow-up questions to encourage communication. Some of these might include:

Questions About the "Spark"

These questions help youth express their interests and why they chose the project in the first place.

- "What is the one thing you want me to know about your project?" (This lets them lead with their strength.)
- Why did you pick this project this year?
- "Point to your favorite part." (Great for non-verbal or anxious youth).
- "What do you like best?"
- "Is this your favorite color/animal/hobby?"
- "Did you have fun making this?"

- "What was the most fun part of working on this?"
- "If you could show your best friend one thing about this, what would it be?"

Questions About the Process and Problem-Solving

Instead of looking for a "perfect" technical answer, these questions look for the life skills the youth developed while working through challenges.

- "Was this hard or easy?"
- "Show me how you used this [tool/brush/item]."
- "Did someone help you? Who was it? What did they teach you?"
- "Look at this spot. How did you do that?"
- "What was an 'oops' moment you had, and how did you fix it?"
- "What is a new tool or skill you used for the first time?"
- "If you did this again, would you change anything? Why?"

Questions About Applying Knowledge

These questions help the youth connect their project to the four H's: Head, Heart, Hands, and Health.

- "Did you have to think a lot to do this?" (Head)
- "What did you have to think really hard about while doing this?"(Head)
- "Does this make you happy?" (Heart)
- "How does this project make you feel when you look at it now?" (Heart)
- "Did you use your hands to build this?" (Hands)
- "How did you use your 'Hands' to make this?" (Hands)
- "Who would you like to give this to?" (Community/Heart)
- "Is there a way this project could help someone else in your community?" (Community)

General Judging Accommodations (e.g., General Entry Day, Food Revue, Demonstration Day, Performing Arts, Fashion Revue, etc.):

- Absentee judging
- Virtual judging
- Allow accessibility equipment
- ADA accessible venue
- Judging in a different space
- Early judging before the scheduled judging time
- Provide a list of questions ahead of time to the youth
- Allow caregiver, family or peer support
- Utilize a visual timer
- Accessible tables (appropriate height)

- Seating options rather than standing or vice versa
- Allow youth to answer interview questions in different ways (written, pre-recorded video, or with a communication device)
- Give extra time to process questions
- Have a visual copy of questions to be asked so youth can hear and see the questions, as well as reference them when answering
- Tailor questions to the youth's ability level, not their chronological age
- Have a familiar person judge the youth's project (4-H Staff or Club leader)
- Offer a calming or sensory space at general entry day
- Allow a parent or sibling to wait in line for a 4-H'er
- Share a visual schedule for the Showcase Judging event
- Offer group or individual judging based on needs
- Share a social story ahead of time
- Allow participation in developmentally vs. age-appropriate classes (older youth in a Cloverbud class)
- Parental or peer support in handling items
- Microphone use
- Reduced number of people in the audience or area

Animal Science Practices (e.g., Dog, Horse) and Judging:

- Allow caregiver, family or peer support in the ring
- Allow accessibility equipment
- Ensure the show ring is accessible for those with mobility needs
- Seating options rather than standing or vice versa
- Early judging before the scheduled judging time
- Provide a list of questions ahead of time to the youth
- Allow youth to answer interview questions in different ways (written, pre-recorded video, or with a communication device)
- Give extra time to process questions
- Have a visual copy of questions to be asked so youth can hear and see the questions, as well as reference them when answering
- Tailor questions to the youth's ability level, not their chronological age
- Offer a calming or sensory space
- Visual schedule
- Share a social story ahead of time
- Allow participation in developmentally vs. grade-appropriate classes (older youth in a Cloverbud class)
- Allow participants to practice early or at another time that allows more one-on-one support and a more sensory-friendly environment

- Allow the use of adaptive equipment and/or modification of tack and equipment that enables the child with a disability to fully participate
- Provide a signaling system or auditory assistance to communicate the call of a class to someone who is visually or hearing impaired
- Utilize both verbal and visual instructions
- Alter the order 4-H'ers enter the show ring to reduce the time in the show ring or provide an example to follow
- Allow individuals to complete judging in a different environment, such as in the barn, pen, or another area that is more accommodating to the youth (e.g., less public, more accessible location, different time)
- Encourage participation in adaptive classes when appropriate
- Provide class patterns before the class or show

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways:

Providing accommodations for judging is not "cheating". Accommodations are put in place to level the playing field. Reference [Important Considerations for Discussing the Equity of Accommodations](#). We want all youth to experience 4-H, including showcase judging events. Just because a youth's engagement doesn't look like you expect, doesn't mean they're not engaged and trying their best. Remember that just attending judging can be extremely overwhelming and may be an accomplishment. Every youth communicates their knowledge differently, and it should be our priority to find the method that best allows the participant to shine. For many youth with disabilities, the most significant learning happens in the doing, rather than in the reflecting. When judging, consider what is developmentally appropriate for each 4-H'er. Focus more on ability level than grade level.

Meetings

4-H meetings provide a place for youth and adults to develop community, connect, lead, share, and learn leadership skills. We want all youth to have an equal opportunity to participate. Below are some accommodations that may help make this a more positive experience.

- Make [accommodation tools](#) available (fidgets, adaptive writing tools, adaptive scissors, etc.).
- Use visual timers.
- Share agendas ahead of time.
- Use visual schedules/agendas.
- Share a social story ahead of time.
- Provide a variety of seating and standing options.

- Provide hands-on activities.
- Keep the business portion of meetings as short as possible.
- Provide a variety of engagement/activity levels (small vs. larger groups, listening vs. doing, high vs. low energy, etc.).
- Use a microphone.
- Make sure everyone can clearly see all people when they speak.
- Request ASL interpreters ahead of time. Contact U of MN Interpreting Captioning Unit (icu@umn.edu) to request an interpreter.
- Provide the [4-H Accommodation Request form](#).
- Utilize [one-page descriptions](#) to get to know one another and identify strengths and needs.
- [Use five-point scales](#) as a shared way to communicate.
- Offer a calming or sensory space.
- Allow youth to participate in activities that are developmentally appropriate. Focus more on ability level than grade level.
- Foster inclusion of youth with disabilities by helping everyone understand the value that unique skills and perspectives bring. Utilize the [Minnesota 4-H Curriculum Library activities](#) to better understand disabilities.

Meeting Accommodations

Food

Food can be a barrier if options are limited. Prioritize choice and flexibility:

- Customizable meals (tacos, baked potatoes, snack bars)
- Potlucks or shared options

The goal is to ensure all youth can find something safe and comfortable to eat.

Space

Meeting location matters. Maybe the current norm has been to meet in a church basement that has an elevator, but it's after hours, so the elevator is turned off.

Perhaps it is on the fairgrounds, but the roads are unpaved, and the building has uneven access points. Consider:

- Physical accessibility
- Transportation barriers
- Safe, easy-to-navigate environments

If needed, explore alternative locations or community partnerships. ADA accessibility should be the minimum, and accessibility should be a natural part of making the space safe for full participation.

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways:

Work with 4-H'ers and their caregivers to identify how 4-H can be most impactful, and how 4-H'ers can most actively engage with meetings. Many of the universal design elements we put in place will benefit everyone (written agendas, visual schedules, hands-on activities, etc.). Be proactive about how needs can be met. Have conversations ahead of time, and strive to make accommodations whenever possible.

4-H Ambassador Events, Trainings and Meetings

4-H Ambassador programs are powerful because youth lead, collaborate, and shape their experience. However, elements such as applications, food, locations, and activities can unintentionally create barriers. Thoughtful design ensures more youth can access and benefit from these opportunities.

Getting Youth Involved

Accessible Participation

Ambassador programs often rely on applications and attendance expectations. To increase access and encourage continued engagement:

- Offer multiple application formats (written, interview, video, recommendations)
- Provide flexible entry points (rolling applications, open meetings)
- Encourage alternative ways to participate (virtual, informal meetups, flexible attendance)

Youth Leadership in Recruitment

Current ambassadors can help recruit and onboard new members, building connections while developing their own leadership skills. This provides a peer-to-peer connection for youth that promotes a safe environment of inclusion and respect amongst all members.

Meeting Accommodations

Food

Food can be a barrier if options are limited. Prioritize choice and flexibility:

- Customizable meals (tacos, baked potatoes, snack bars)

- Potlucks or shared options

The goal is to ensure all youth can find something safe and comfortable to eat.

Space

Meeting location matters. Maybe the current norm has been to meet in a church basement that has an elevator, but it's after hours, so the elevator is turned off. Perhaps it is on the fairgrounds, but the roads are unpaved, and the building has uneven access points. Consider:

- Physical accessibility
- Transportation barriers
- Safe, easy-to-navigate environments

If needed, explore alternative locations or community partnerships. ADA accessibility should be the minimum, and accessibility should be a natural part of making the space safe for full participation.

Marketing and Outreach

Ensure marketing is accessible and clearly communicates expectations. Use peer outreach (ambassadors visiting clubs, partner programs, and community engagement) to build familiarity and confidence for new participants.

Don't "tokenize" youth with disabilities. Some may be willing to be champions, but many just want to fit in and be treated like their peers. Minimize the use of youth with disabilities as an example for inclusivity. Let them share their experiences and their stories when they are comfortable sharing; being an inclusive ambassador program should include, but not artificially emphasize, their ability to thrive.

Norms and Expectations

Set clear and visible expectations. Don't rely on "unspoken rules". Instead, define and review norms so all youth understand how to participate successfully.

- Norms should be positive, uplifting, and intentionally include inclusive language. Display a visual poster of the group norms.
- Include how the group can hold itself accountable, taking pressure off individuals or adults to maintain expectations.
 - If a norm is broken, the team could have a code phrase such as "try again" to support peer accountability.
- Ensure norms include room for growth.

Activities

Activities build teamwork and confidence, but can also create barriers. Design activities with multiple ways to participate so all youth can engage meaningfully, regardless of ability.

Meeting Accommodation Scenario

Ambassador marketing may start with youth sharing about 4-H publicly. This could be to the general public, or more specifically to audiences of youth with disabilities such as special education classrooms during the day.

At the first Ambassador meeting, before an activity, come together to set ground rules. These may include "Listen openly, respect other opinions, etc." An example that may tokenize youth would be a norm worded as "make sure to include [name of participant]". Rephrase the norm to say, "include all youth leaders, regardless of background."

Lastly, the activity may be a spaghetti tower. The objective may be for a team to build the highest tower possible, but this would not account for youth with differing abilities related to fine motor skills, or with sensory issues, who may get overwhelmed by the chaos of the team working together. Instead, offer objective options (build the tallest, or the widest on the floor), and clearly define roles for team members to complete based on skill and ability promoting inclusion.

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways:

Youth learn important leadership and service skills in 4-H Ambassador programs. Accommodations and modifications enhance, not diminish, the program. All youth, especially those with disabilities, need routine for comfort. Work with youth to integrate programs and events into their routine. Ensure youth understand expectations, outcomes, and engagement opportunities. Here is a short list of key takeaways for planning a program or event.

- Use routine to help youth feel comfortable.
- Provide multiple ways to participate in activities and team building.
- Youth are known best by their caregivers. Partner with caregivers to support youth with disabilities.
- Universal Design means a program that is structurally inclusive for all participants. Youth with and without disabilities are presented with more opportunities to thrive.

- Be confidential; it is important to maintain confidentiality and ensure youth with disabilities feel safe.

Shooting Sports

Shooting sports can be highly inclusive for youth with disabilities, offering a wide range of accommodations that range from facility modifications to equipment accommodations to high-tech assistive devices.



General Accommodations:

- Utilize the [Adaptive Shooting Action Plan](#). This plan is intended to be used as a facilitated conversation between the young person, caregivers, and 4-H certified discipline instructor to develop personalized modifications.
- Reference the [Adaptive Archery Resources](#).
- Meet at accessible facilities: Ensure accessible ranges, restrooms, and other facilities.
- Training and education: Provide training and education on adaptive techniques and equipment, as well as ensuring that instructors are trained to work with individuals with disabilities.
- Allow participants to practice early or at another time that allows more one-on-one support and a more sensory-friendly environment

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways:

The core philosophy of adaptive shooting sports is that disabilities should not be barriers to the firing line. Many accommodations, modifications, and technologies can almost entirely bridge the gap between disability and high-level performance. Due to the nature of the sport, accommodations must never compromise safety. Every accommodation and modification should be vetted to ensure the shooter maintains total control over their firearm. Staff, shooting sports trainers, caregivers, and 4-H'ers must all work together to ensure participation and safety.

Virtual Opportunities

Virtual education opportunities provide all 4-H'ers the opportunity to participate in learning from the comfort of their homes. By removing physical barriers and offering high levels of customization, virtual environments often provide a "barrier-free" classroom that can be hard to replicate. Below are some examples of ways to make accommodations in virtual opportunities.

- Provide Resources in Different Formats: Announce at the beginning of your event how people will be able to access your materials. Offer a couple of different ways, if possible. For example, offer the slides in a recorded version of the event and a handout they can download before, during, or afterwards.
- Speak Simply and Slowly: When you are proofreading your content, consider whether you are using simple language and simplify where you can. Then, check in throughout your session on whether you are speaking too quickly.
- Describe Images and Videos: Many videos come with descriptive audio; utilize these videos whenever possible. If you reference a photo or image during your presentation, describe it verbally.
- Screen Readers: Screen Readers work well with Zoom and Google Meet. However, in Zoom, a screen reader will read aloud all chat messages, which can lead to the screen reader speaking over the speaker. If you know that a screen reader may be used at your event, make plans to keep chats to a minimum. Use the Q & A feature and designate someone to receive all chat messages and read them aloud at a specific time during the event.
- Clearly Outline How Participants Can Ask for Accommodations During the Event: The Zoom Q&A feature can be a great resource to offer participants who want to ask you for accommodations during the event. For example, a learner might ask if you have a table or a chart in a different format, or if you can slow down. Whether you use the Q&A feature or another mechanism. Have a plan for how participants can get in touch with you during the event to let you know they need an accommodation or that they are having difficulty with the virtual platform.
- Closed Captions: There are many people who utilize closed captions to help support their attention and learning during virtual education events, including people with disabilities. Automatic closed captions are the default setting in both Zoom and Google Meet.
- Transcripts: Transcripts of the virtual education event can provide a useful resource for learners with cognitive or auditory disabilities.
 - Zoom: You can opt into saving the transcript by modifying your settings in Meeting >> In Meeting (Advanced) >> Transcript. Switch on the slider next to the option to "Allow participants to save fully closed captions or transcripts." You can choose who will save the captions, then view and distribute captions after each meeting under the Recordings & Transcripts tab.
 - Google Meet: If you record a Google meeting, you can select "Record captions" to embed the captions in the clip.

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways:

Virtual spaces allow students to decide when and how to disclose their disability. Tools that were once expensive add-ons are now standard features (real-time transcription, AI-driven task breakdown, and screen readers). This creates a Universal Design where the environment adapts to the student, not the other way around. By eliminating the commute, accessibility, and sensory triggers of a physical setting, 4-H'ers can dedicate more energy to learning. Always utilize available accessibility features and be clear about how participants can contact facilitators when they have unmet needs.

Travel Events (National Trips, Exchanges)

Traveling out of state is often a young person's first real taste of independence. 4-H has many structured opportunities that provide this experience in a safe environment. Below are some accommodations that may help make this a more positive experience.

- Have proactive conversations about the needs with the families of individuals with disabilities, chaperones, host families, etc.
- Review transportation company requirements and make a plan for addressing any potential challenges.
- Select accessible transportation options. This may mean going with one transportation option over another.
- Ensure that hosts and all aspects of the trip are accessible to all participants.
- Utilize programs such as [Navigating MSP](#) to help familiarize participants with and prepare for air travel.
- Based on needs, allow caregivers as group chaperones and/or personal care assistants (PCA) *Note: UMN Disability Resource Center may have funds to help support PCA costs, such as food, housing, travel, registration, but not PCA staffing time
- Provide social stories ahead of time. For example:
 - Share [MSP Social Stories](#).
- Schedule a virtual meeting with host families before traveling
- Utilize accessible lodging options. This may require a caregiver to stay with a youth to help ensure they have the support they need.
- Ensure chaperones are prepared to be an advocate with the young person.

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways:

Have proactive conversations with 4-H'ers and caregivers and destination hosts early about travel needs, so there is adequate time to ensure everyone's needs can be met. Consider all needs when making travel plans, and make sure to explore available accessible travel options.

Program Agreement and After School Programs

Planning a program should include preparations for youth with disabilities to be successful. Planning programs with partners is no different. As you prepare to deliver a program with a partner, discuss the ways they have planned for an inclusive event in the past, and be prepared to share some typical preparation techniques you have used. The list below outlines categories typically discussed as partners plan for programming together, with questions in each category that support planning for an inclusive program.

Communication - Plan for how and when to effectively communicate:

- Are any accommodations needed to facilitate effective communication?
- Will any participants use Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices? If so, what do I need to know to prepare to communicate in this way?
- How can we help all program participants understand that all youth, including those with disabilities, are important to the program and are valued?

Program Development:

- Is the facility ADA accessible?
- What tools will we use to help support an inclusive environment?
- Who will lead facilitation, and who will lead behavior management?
 - How should we plan to get the group's attention?
 - How will we handle challenging behaviors?
 - If a partner has previous experience with this group of youth, what has worked and or not worked to facilitate effective programming?
- How can we meet the needs of multiple learning styles?
- How will we distribute materials? Can we provide multiple formats?

Finance:

- Is there any funding available for accommodations?

Program Staff:

- How will we know youth's needs?
- Does the registration process allow for caregivers to share a need?
- How will we train staff or volunteers to support an inclusive program?

Program Promotion:

- How will we let potential participants know accommodations are available?
- How will we follow up on accommodation requests?
- Can we provide promotional materials in a variety of formats?
- Who will communicate with caregivers? What is our communication plan for sensitive information?
- How do we speak to caregivers about disabilities? Who will lead this part of the program?

Program Implementation:

- Who provides materials for accommodations?
- What accommodation tools will each of us provide?
- How can evaluation be communicated to all types of learners effectively?

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways:

Working with program partners provides an opportunity to align communication and decision-making to ensure accommodation needs are met. Clearly identify roles and responsibilities so that nothing is overlooked and everyone knows who will do what. Ask questions when setting up the partnership and whenever there are staff transitions. It can also be helpful to note the information learned through the questions above in your program agreement responsibilities.

4-H Online/Fair Entry Registration Processes

Asking about accommodation needs during event registration isn't just nice to do or checking a legal checkbox. It's the difference between having 4-H'ers who feel valued and those who feel unwanted and invisible. When you ignore this step, you're essentially saying the event was only designed for a specific "type" of person, specifically those who don't need any support in participating. This may exclude many 4-H'ers with disabilities from even seeing participation as a possibility. Staff and volunteers should be thinking and asking about accommodation needs every time they plan an activity, event, or program. Below are some event registration accommodations that can help ensure 4-H member participation.

- Share the [4-H Accommodation Request Form](#)
- Make sure to include the recommended accommodation request wording on all marketing and registration materials
 - “If you, or a 4-H participant, need disability-related or other accommodations to participate in this program or have questions about the physical accessibility of the event location, please contact _____ (list name and phone number of the local Extension office and program contact) at registration or at least 2 weeks prior to the program or event. Late notice may limit our ability to provide requested accommodations.”
- Include the recommended accommodation questions on all registration forms. Suggested wording is included in the [4-H Online Event Registration checklist](#).
- Include wording on marketing and registration materials stating specific or general accommodations already being made. (e.g., “Event will be accommodating for all youth, including those with visual impairments.”)
- Be clear about event demands and environments
- Create a custom field at the Fair level of the Hierarchy for fair registration. Suggested wording is included in the [FairEntry setup instructions](#).
- Review participant enrollment data for disability/accommodation-related information shared, even if there weren't any event-specific accommodation requests
- Review accommodation requests made at least one week before each event
- Proactively contact families to gather more information about accommodation requests
- Contact [Darcy Cole](#), Minnesota 4-H liaison to the UMN Disability Resource Center, for help securing accommodations or with questions
- Make sure to proactively share accommodation request information with those who will support the 4-H'er (judges, project superintendents, volunteers, etc.). Sharing the information is just as important as collecting it from families.

Final Thoughts and Key Takeaways:

The goal isn't just to make your event accessible, but rather to make it welcoming. Accessibility is a technical standard, while belonging is a feeling. By asking the right questions early, you ensure every participant can show up to participate, learn, and lead, rather than needing to focus on obstacles that prevent them from fully engaging. True accessibility is proactive, so plan for it in each step (promotion, registration, and at the event).

© 2026, Regents of the University of Minnesota. University of Minnesota Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this publication/material is available in alternative formats upon request. Direct requests to 612-624-2116.