University of Minnesota Extension

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2026 Ignite by 4-H & Citizenship Washington Focus

Participant Application Information

Thank you for your interest in representing Minnesota 4-H and expanding your leadership skills at **Ignite by 4-H** or **CWF @ Ignite**! This document includes:

- ☐ Information about the Ignite & CWF experiences
- ☐ Expectations of participation as a Minnesota delegate
- ☐ Details on how to apply - **due September 22 (extended from September 8!**

The National 4-H Council plans the majority of the event activities. Minnesota 4-H facilitates the state selection process, training & preparation, travel process, and some on-trip activities.

Ignite by 4-H

March 25-29, 2026 ***(potential travel days on Mar. 24 and Mar. 30)***
The four-day interactive summit helps teens find their spark through inspiring speakers, hands-on workshops, off-site experiences, career exploration, and connecting with peers. Ignite is a step forward in the journey of becoming beyond ready. At Ignite, teens collaborate, create, and cultivate a passion for expanding their minds and their world—becoming resilient and READY for everything life has to offer.

Youth will experience Ignite through one of five content tracks: AgriScience, Animal Science, Community Accelerators, Healthy Living, or STEM. While at the conference, youth will develop a ***Lead to Change*** plan to take action on a community issue they care about that is connected to their chosen track. They will also meet youth from across the US interested in this topic, hear from youth doing cool things in their communities, listen to inspiring speakers, and explore sites in the DC area. Learn more here.

CWF @ Ignite

March 24-29, 2026 ***(potential travel days on Mar. 23 and Mar. 30)***
Formerly known as Citizenship Washington Focus and held in June-July, this track within the Ignite conference remains the cornerstone leadership experience for teens passionate about civic engagement, public policy, and advocacy as pathways to community change. Participants will strengthen their understanding of the democratic process and cultivate leadership skills rooted in civic responsibility. With this foundation, they'll discover how local action can spark impact on national and global levels.

The CWF delegation will travel one day earlier than other Ignite participants and they will engage in some additional activities. All other components are similar. Learn more here.

Note: This experience is anticipated to include over 1200 youth from across the country. Many activities occur in large auditoriums with all event participants present. Youth applicants and their families should consider their comfort level and ability to handle involvement in a group this size before applying.

General information about both experiences



Before you go, all delegates are expected to…

- Attend pre-departure virtual meetings. The sessions include information about the experience, educational preparatory work, and time to meet others traveling and learn about expectations.
- Complete required assignments between meetings (approximately 1-4 hours/month).
- Respond in a timely manner (72 hours or less) to information requests from the state 4-H office.
- Make their own arrangements for missing class, work, or other obligations.

While on the trip, all delegates are expected to…

- The Minnesota 4-H office will arrange for flights between Minneapolis and Washington, DC, and will coordinate travel in DC. Selected delegates will be responsible for transportation to the airport.
- Participants must travel and remain with the Minnesota delegation at all times.
- Lodging will be provided according to University of Minnesota & event guidelines - youth will be roomed in hotel rooms with 1 other participant of similar gender and age.
- Most meals will be provided as part of the experience.

Upon return, all delegates are expected to…

- Attend a virtual post-trip reflection meeting
- Plan and carry out a "Lead to Change" community action plan (developed during the event)
- Complete a post-trip written reflection

Who can apply

Required qualifications:

- Must be a current and active Minnesota 4-H member throughout their participation
- Remain in good standing as a Minnesota 4-H member and follow the 4-H Code of Conduct
- At the time of attendance, must be a high school student who is at least 14, and no older than 19
- Must be willing to make the time and fully commit to participating in all required components, include a post-experience project in Minnesota
- Should have experience or demonstrated interest and willingness to interact positively with youth and adults from diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and identities.
- Demonstrate ability to promote and maintain a positive representation of Minnesota 4-H.
- Must not have attended the conference(s) you are applying to as a delegate before.
    - In 2026 only, teens that have attended Citizenship Washington Focus previously are able to apply to attend Ignite by 4-H in one of the other 5 area tracks.
    - In 2026 only, teens that have attended Ignite by 4-H previously are able to apply to attend Ignite in the CWF @ Ignite track.

For Ignite by 4-H, teams of youth may be interested in applying to attend. Each person must submit the written application and video, and the selection will be done on an individual basis.

How to apply

Application Timeline

Aug. 11	**Applications open**
Aug. 11-Sept. 22	Prepare and submit your application: • Essay questions • 3-5 minute video • Reference name submission
Sept. 22	**Application deadline**
Sept. 23-October 14	Ignite and CWF @ Ignite applications reviewed by regional selection teams
October 15	Finalists notified
Oct. 22	Delegate acceptance due
Oct. 30	$250 deposit due



Application steps & details

Apply to one or more tracks of these experiences through the following common application process. Complete all steps by **Monday, Sept. 22, 11:59 pm**:

1. **Review the event information**: Review the details for each experience to ensure you understand the expectations - **Ignite information** – **CWF @ Ignite information**.
2. **Complete the online application:** The questions are provided at the end of this document so you can prepare them in advance.
3. **Upload your video** - you can upload at this link OR in the online application
    a. Videos should be 3-5 minutes long and include the information in the video details below.
    b. Your submitted video does **NOT** need to be perfectly edited, just make sure the sound quality is decent. Your video will only be viewed by the selection committee.
    c. When uploading your video, change the name of the video to your first and last name, and which experience you are applying to. *Example: Charlie-Clover-Ignite.mp4*

If you'd like to request an accommodation for the application process due to a disability or other situation, please contact: Randi Schwartz, 4-H Program Manager, schw1553@umn.edu | 612-301-3207

Video details

A video must be submitted by the application deadline for your application to be considered complete Videos should include:

- **Introduce yourself!** Include your first name, where you are from and/or currently live, and why you want to attend, then…
- Tell us about a community need or opportunity to improve that you care about and could be an area you focus on for your Lead to Change project. In your video be sure to at least include the following items:
    - What is the community's need or opportunity to improve that you've identified?
    - How do you know this is an issue?
    - Why is it important to you?
    - Why should others care?
    - What (if anything) have you already done, and what are some ideas of what you think you could do to make a positive difference on this issue within the next year?
- Note: A "community issue" is a problem or concern that a group or community (school, town, neighborhood, state, country) has and believes they can fix. It should be something that impacts more people than just you or your immediate family.

How applications will be reviewed & evaluated

1. All applications are first reviewed for completion. Incomplete applications may not be reviewed.
2. The state 4-H office will review all applications to ensure they meet the required qualifications.
3. Complete applications that meet the qualifications will be sent to review teams.
    a. Review teams consist of Minnesota 4-H and/or University of Minnesota staff and past event participants.
    b. Each track will be reviewed individually by separate review teams.
4. Review teams will review the applications and score them based on this rubric.
5. Review teams will rank the applicants in their track and submit to the state 4-H office.
6. The state 4-H office will review the review team rankings and develop the finalist list for review by 4-H state and county leadership.





Application Questions

Please complete the application online by September 22, at 11:59 pm. You are encouraged to prepare your written answers in advance and transfer them to the online application.

Which track(s) are you interested in applying to? Review the track descriptions

Demographic information

1. Name
2. County or tribal nation 4-H program
3. Grade in school, age as of 3/24/2026
4. Email address & phone number
5. Parent/guardian name & contact info
6. How did you learn about this opportunity?

Application questions on the online form

Please limit your responses to no more than 300 words each.

1. **4-H Experiences:** Describe the 4-H projects, groups, and/or activities that have prepared you to be ready for a national 4-H experience. Include how long you've been involved if possible.
    a. Note: A longer list doesn't mean a better list!
2. **Time Management:** Participation in this experience requires you to attend pre-departure meetings (1/month, 1.5 hours long, January-March), complete some light homework (1-2 hours/month), attend the full trip, and then plan and implement a Lead to Change community action project within one year. Tell us how you will have time for this in your busy schedule.
3. **Your Leadership Journey:** Explain how you've grown in your leadership (in and outside of 4-H) development so far, and how you've exhibited leadership skills in your home, school, 4-H club, or community. Provide specific examples of things that have shaped your growth and how.
4. **Influence on your Future:** How do you think participating in this national event will influence your future—whether in 4-H, in school, or your career? Be specific about skills, connections, or experiences you hope to gain.
5. **Connecting with Others:** Describe a time when you connected with someone from a different background, culture, or community. What did you learn from that interaction, and how do you think meeting youth from other states will challenge or expand your perspective?
6. **Track Specific Interest:** For each track that you are interested in, tell us why you want to attend that track and what you hope to learn from the experience.
    a. We invite you to express interest in multiple tracks; however, finalists will be selected to participate in only one track at the Ignite by 4-H or CWF @ Ignite conference. If you are interested in multiple tracks please rank them in order of preference in your application.
7. Video upload (see instructions here)

Reference

List at least one, but up to two people who can serve as a reference for you. The references will be emailed a link to complete a form with questions about you. You can see a copy of the questions below if you want to think about who would be your best references. A copy of the answers they supply will not be shared with you. You will need their name, title, and contact information for your application.

2025 National 4-H Events Reference

If you are selected as a semi-finalist, we will send this form to your listed reference(s) to complete. In your application, you will be asked to share the name and contact information of someone who is not a close relative to serve as your reference. You will not receive a copy of their responses.

Need ideas for a reference? Think about someone who knows you well and could answer the following questions about you. Some groups to consider: teachers, coaches, 4-H leaders, people from your religious organization, groups you belong to, neighbors, etc.

Applicant name: _____

The above-named individual has applied to be a Minnesota delegate to a National 4-H Event in Washington, DC - Ignite by 4-H, National 4-H Conference, or Citizenship Washington Focus. Your thoughtful evaluation of the applicant's ability to participate will be greatly appreciated. All information is shared only with the selection committee. Please answer only the questions you feel you have insight.

1. If selected, the applicant will be expected to dedicate approximately 5 hours/month, January-March towards participation in pre-conference calls and completion of light homework. After the experience, they will need to plan and implement a meaningful project in their home community to apply what they've learned. ***Please comment on the applicant's commitment to activities and time management skills***.
2. If selected, the applicant would be one of just a few representatives from Minnesota 4-H at the national level. They could be communicating with federal agency decision-makers and 4-H youth and staff from across the country. It is important that the youth selected be good representatives of our state and the 4-H program, can be seen as a role model, and can interact with people from all different backgrounds, perspectives, and identities. ***Please comment on the applicant's strengths and areas of growth related to this.***
3. Following the conference, all applicants are expected to plan and carry out a community action project. Applicants will begin developing their project before the conference and may have access to some financial resources to carry it out. ***Based on what you know of the applicant and their community, do you have any suggestions on projects, topics, resources, etc, that they could look into?*** (This information will be shared with the applicant during the action planning process and is not used as a basis of selection)
4. ***Do you have anything else to add that we should know about?***
5. ***How do you know this applicant, and would you recommend them for participation in this experience? Why or why not?***

Reference name: _____ Title (if applicable):_____

Email: _____ Phone: _____