UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

4-H Local Ambassador Program Guide

For 4-H staff and volunteers to start and sustain a high-quality youth leadership program in your county or Tribal Nation

University of Minnesota, Extension Department of Youth Development - 2024

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About the 4-H Local Ambassador Program Guide

This guide provides an overview of the expected structure and components of a Local Ambassador program. Using data collected over five years, the Minnesota 4-H Civic Engagement and Leadership (CEL) state function team developed this resource to articulate a consistent structure focused on strength and sustainability, while allowing flexibility to meet local and programmatic needs.

Between 2012-15, the program model and related curriculum was piloted with thirteen county 4-H programs, using their findings to further craft the design into the model that endures today. Periodic reviews conducted every 3-5 years incorporate best practices and current research in youth leadership development, as well as program evaluation data from 4-H groups utilizing the program model and curriculum.

About Minnesota 4-H Youth Development

Minnesota 4-H Youth Development is a part of the University of Minnesota Extension Department of Youth Development. It is the largest youth-serving organization in the state, and its programming is grounded in research-based practice. Minnesota 4-H is committed to creating a force of young people who are able to learn and lead in a global society.

Leadership Development in Minnesota 4-H

The Minnesota 4-H Leadership Tree was designed to articulate the leadership development pathway youth can take to and through the Minnesota 4-H program. Youth build leadership skills and understanding through focused leadership education efforts, and through their involvement in project (content) areas.

The local ambassador program engages youth as a "Developing Leadership" program.

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Overview

Minnesota 4-H prepares youth to learn and lead in a global society. Youth develop an understanding of themselves and the world around them by building skills and contributing to positive change. Ultimately, we aim **to develop informed and engaged leaders ready to learn and lead in a global society.**

Through 4-H, Minnesota youth participate in civic engagement and leadership experiences at the local, regional, state, and national levels. **Minnesota 4-H Ambassadors** are high-quality youth leadership efforts engaging a team of youth in learning and leading at the local and state levels and within project areas.

Ambassadors are engaged in learning, practicing, and applying global citizenship and communication skills, preparing them to learn and lead in a global society. Our model expects that all Ambassador groups include intentional program planning, positive youth-adult partnerships, and opportunities for authentic youth voice, which lead to our overall goal:

To inspire young people to realize their interconnectedness and recognize and act on their ability to make positive contributions to society.

Objectives

Minnesota 4-H Local Ambassadors are youth in grades 6 through one year past high school who represent a variety of 4-H projects, programs, and groups. Local Ambassadors are role models for other youth involved in 4-H programs and are expected to be positive representatives of 4-H.

As a team, Ambassadors engage as both learners and leaders. They develop skills in leadership, civic engagement, communication, and teamwork, and put those skills into practice by serving as leaders within their local 4-H programs, their communities, and/or within different content areas.

Learning objectives

- Youth understand, develop, and apply global youth citizenship skills (thinking, communication, understanding self in relation to others, understanding others, and social responsibility).
- Youth develop an understanding of themselves and gain confidence in their leadership, civic engagement, and communication skills.
- Youth understand and promote the breadth and diversity of 4-H as they learn about and share opportunities for themselves and other young people.

Leadership objectives

- Youth apply leadership and civic engagement skills individually and in group settings through their regular meetings, service projects, and promotion opportunities.
- Youth meaningfully contribute to 4-H and the local and global community through teaching, leadership, and civic engagement.
- Youth represent and can share and articulate the 4-H goals and mission with the larger community through formal or informal public speaking events or activities.

Program structure

Participants

Local 4-H Ambassador programs are composed of youth who serve as **Local Ambassadors** and adult volunteers and/or 4-H staff who serve as **Ambassador Advisors**, providing support and guidance for the program and the individual Ambassadors. These youth and adult participants engage as partners in planning, implementing, and evaluating their Ambassador program.

Local Ambassadors

Youth are the focus of the Local 4-H Ambassador program. The number of youth in the program will vary, but an ideal size is 8 to 20. Youth must:

- Enroll in Minnesota 4-H
- Be in at least the 6th grade
- Be willing to commit 2-4 hours per month to program meetings & activities

If more than 20 youth are active in the program, consider splitting the group to ensure the engagement of all participants. You might consider dividing the group by age level, creating middle school (junior Ambassador) and high school (Ambassador) teams, or splitting the group by geographic area (e.g., east & west county ambassadors).

Application process and orientation

Once a young person has decided to become an ambassador, there should be a process for them to join the program. Regardless of the process used, it is highly encouraged to include several access points throughout the year to welcome new youth into the program. A sample application is available in the Additional Resources section.

After being welcomed into the program, youth should be oriented to the program to get to know their role as an ambassador. This may include attending a Local Ambassador Program Training with a Regional Educator or a locally-organized orientation.

Ambassador Advisors

A minimum of two adults must be directly involved in the program to serve as the Ambassador Advisors. Advisors serve as a team, and the roles of each advisor should be clearly articulated to ensure everyone makes a meaningful contribution to the oversight of the program. Their responsibilities include:

- Oversight of the Local 4-H Ambassador Program
- Working with 4-H staff and other volunteers to support the needs of the program and individual participants
- Maintaining the status of an active and screened Minnesota 4-H volunteer

Additional advisors or co-advisors should be recruited if the number of participants increases to ensure adequate supervision (see below). The supervision ratio must be maintained at all Local Ambassador meetings, programs, and events, including virtual experiences.

- For ages 8 and younger: a minimum of 1:8 adult to youth ratio
- For ages 9 to 14: a minimum of 1:10 program staff to youth ratio
- For ages 15 and older: a minimum of 1:12 program staff to youth ratio

Being an adult advisor to a 4-H Ambassador program can be a very rewarding experience. The key responsibilities of the advisors are explained further in the 4-H Volunteer Adult Ambassador Advisor position description available in the Additional Resources.

Local 4-H Educators

The Local 4-H Educator is an integral part of a successful Local 4-H Ambassador Program. Their responsibilities include:

- Ensuring positive youth development principles are applied in the program
- Developing a funding model or budget for the program
- Recruiting youth and adult volunteers to participate
- Encouraging relevant training for volunteer advisors
- Ensuring volunteers are screened and risk management practices are in place
- Reporting participation through periodic reporting of Minnesota 4-H programs and other statewide reports
- Submitting an annual program plan to the Regional Extension Educator (REE)

Beyond these responsibilities, the involvement of the Local 4-H Educator in the delivery of the program may vary, with some Local 4-H Educators serving as one of the advisors and others serving in more of a support role. Regardless of the exact level of involvement, the Local 4-H Educator and the Local 4-H Ambassador Advisors should communicate regularly.

Regional Educators

The Civic Engagement and Leadership Regional Educators serve as the main point of contact for CEL programs happening across and within regions. In regard to Local Ambassador programs, you can expect the CEL Regional Educator to:

- Provide baseline comprehensive training of the Local Ambassador Program Model;
- Provide ongoing support to local advisors through regular meetings;
- Provide educational components and skill-building opportunities for participants in your local program;
- Assist with problem-solving and idea generation; and
- Connect you and your program to additional resources and events.

CEL educators use the annual program planning tool to learn more about your program and identify themes of support throughout the region.

Youth and adults as partners

Minnesota 4-H values youth-adult partnerships as an effective way to engage in positive youth development. As youth and adults join together for their Ambassador program, intentional efforts to operate at the "top of Hart's ladder" (see Figure 1) should be made to ensure authentic partnerships are in place. Helpful practices include:

- **Practice respect** – Adults may have past experiences valuable to youth, and youth may have innovative ideas to add to the conversation. Do not talk down to each other.
- **Participate** – Be willing to share your experiences and learn from each other.
- **Be responsible** – Follow through on what you say you will do, and communicate with others about challenges you are experiencing in completing your responsibilities.
- **Communicate** – Listen to each other and ask questions when needed.
- **Be willing to accept advice** – Advice based on past experiences can be a valuable resource as plans for action are created.
- **Keep a positive attitude** – Focus on similarities, rather than differences, and work together to create the best possible team experience for everyone.

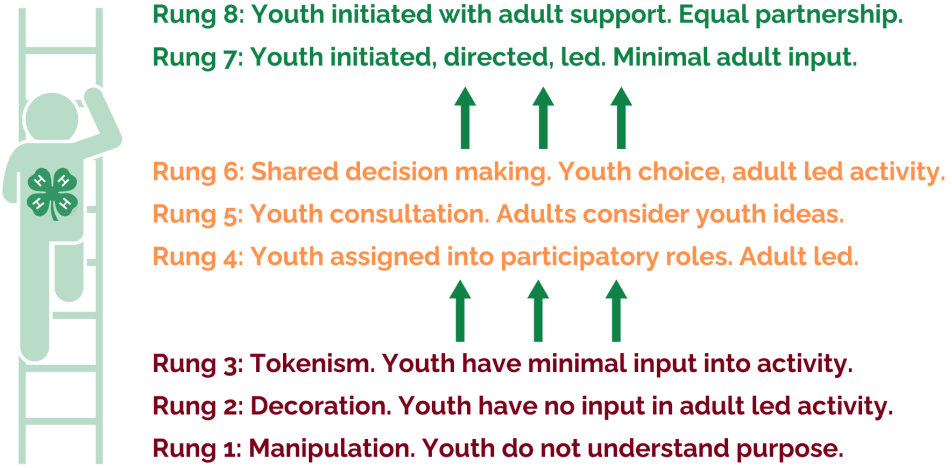


Figure 1: Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation.
A. Sparks, K. Griebenow, 2024. Adapted from: Hart, R. (1992). Children's participation from tokenism to citizenship. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

Group organization & leadership

As you plan your program, you should consider an effective & equitable leadership structure for the program and the youth members. As your program develops, facilitate a conversation with youth through the following three simple steps:

1. Decide on needed responsibilities.
2. Decide on roles.
3. Decide on terms and selection process.

Keep in mind that the best leadership structure may change not only depending on the make-up of the group but also on how long a group has been around. Below are some examples of potential leadership structures. Sometimes the right model might be a combination of one, two, or more of these models. Read more about equitable youth leadership structures.

Officers

The traditional leadership models government roles and includes a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer.

- Presents a familiar structure to the youth with guidelines and expectations of each role
- Creates aspirational roles for youth

Core Leadership Team

Senior members in the group take on leadership roles and serve as mentors to newer members.

- Team approach to leadership from experienced youth
- Share responsibilities to maintain reasonable time commitment
- Provides many youth the opportunity to serve in a key leadership position
- Allows capacity for a junior leadership team (or ambassador-in-training type program) to surface

Shared Leadership

Leadership of meetings and activities rotates to each interested member.

- Gives each member an opportunity to lead meetings and activities
- Eliminates competitive aspect of position-seeking

Committees

Activities are categorized into themes with youth leaders assigned as chairs of committees.

- Provides an opportunity for youth to lead a smaller group toward a shared goal
- Creates an executive board of committee chairs to connect program elements
- Committees can be event-specific (County Fair, Project workshop, etc) or be theme-based (service, outreach, social/belonging, etc)

Meeting format

Many aspects contribute to a successful and productive meeting or gathering of young people. Spending time planning these gatherings will be important for the success and growth of the local program.

Each meeting of your group is recommended to last between 1 and 2 hours. Depending on training topics, meetings may be a bit longer, so communicate that extra time with the youth. Monthly meetings are highly encouraged to keep the momentum. Each meeting should have a plan/agenda outlining what will be covered, to ensure adequate supplies, space, and time to complete the objectives of the meeting. A sample agenda for a 90-minute meeting is below:

15 minutes	Social time & Team building
15 minutes	Business meeting
45 minutes	Education, service, and/or activity planning
15 minutes	Reflection & action planning

Scheduling

Like most 4-H groups, Local Ambassador groups must meet a minimum of 6 times a year, but many local 4-H Ambassador programs will hold 9-12 meetings per year. This may vary depending on your program's activities, and the availability of youth and volunteers. Do your best to accommodate as many people as possible to have the best representation at meetings, and acknowledge that, while it's best if members attend as many meetings as possible, some members may not be able to attend more than just one or two. This is especially the case for members who join your program midyear. The point is to have consistency in programming and to make it as accessible as possible to the youth who are prospective participants. However, when scheduling your meetings, make sure meetings are not scheduled in a way that consistently excludes a member or members from attending.

Virtual meetings, though perhaps less ideal, can be a mechanism for maintaining connection with youth during winter travel months, or busy activity times. Consider recording the business portion of the meeting so those absent can get caught up on essential team activities and decisions.

Core programmatic components

Local 4-H Ambassador programs vary across the state, however, based on research and understanding of best practices, four program components have been deemed essential to conducting high-quality Ambassador programs: **education & skill-building, service & service-learning, promotion of 4-H and 4-H activities,** and **inclusion and networking**. Individual teams are expected to adapt their program to meet local needs, while striving to ensure all essential components are included.

Education & skill-building

Providing training to the youth in the Ambassador program allows them to develop and refine their skills to lead and builds their capacity for understanding community issues. In addition to the required content areas below, consider tying the curriculum to other events in the program year. For instance, if Ambassadors will be doing a promotional event, consider the skills they will need to be successful at that event.

When planning your Ambassador year, choose **at least one lesson from each of the FOUR MAIN categories:**

- **Understanding 4-H:** To better understand the breadth and diversity of 4-H.
- **Promotion & communication:** To enhance youth leadership and communication skills.
- **Global citizenship:** To build an understanding of self, each other, and the world around them.
- **Service:** To enhance understanding of issues in their community, and gain skills in planning to take positive action.

Lessons for each of these categories are found in the Local Ambassador curriculum. If you have additional lesson plans to contribute, send them to a civic engagement and leadership team member for inclusion consideration.

Service & service-learning

There are many levels and types of service that groups can choose to do. All service should strive to address local community needs and provide opportunities for youth to understand the complexity and history of the issues their service is addressing. Service in an Ambassador program consists of both acts of service *within the local 4-H program* and those *within the community*:

Within the local 4-H program (to the 4-H program): Service where the *primary beneficiary* is 4-H members or the 4-H program.

- ***Examples:*** Preparing the 4-H Buildings for the county fair, teaching Cloverbuds.

Within the community (through the 4-H program): Service where the *primary beneficiary* is a community organization or group outside of 4-H.

- ***Examples:*** Conducting a supply drive for a community need, serving at a local organization.

Promotion & communication

Local 4-H Ambassadors are representatives of the local 4-H program and of 4-H more broadly, and they serve an important role in sharing with the public all that 4-H has to offer. Even when not in an official "promotion" activity, Ambassadors "promote" the 4-H program through their actions within the community.

Promotion includes engaging with the public in a variety of ways, including:

- attending or participating in community events,
- hosting an information booth or activity station at the county fair,
- writing articles for the local newspaper,
- going on local radio stations, and more.

It may also include promotion within the 4-H program, such as

- promoting regional, statewide, or national opportunities within 4-H,
- conducting club visits, or
- providing guidance to new members and new member families.

Inclusion and networking

If youth are having fun and feeling part of a positive group, they will likely stay and enthusiastically represent 4-H in their service and promotion activities. Each lesson in the Local Ambassador curriculum includes a 10-15 minute team building activity introducing that lesson's content. This is one way of incorporating fun and socialization while encouraging positive relationships to form.

Additionally, local ambassador programs could consider additional connection points and/or ways to build group cohesion. Some ideas include:

- Field trips or exchanges with other similar groups,
- End-of-year celebrations,
- Creating a group t-shirt.

In addition to building and strengthening relationships with each other, a Local Ambassador program provides a unique opportunity to connect youth with adult leaders in their community and beyond. Building a young person's social network inspires them to pursue new ideas or careers, and can create a system of support and connection that may be beneficial to them in the future. Some ideas of building a social network include:

- Having Ambassadors interview "leaders" in their community that are in an area of interest,
- Engaging community leaders, colleagues, etc, with teaching lessons at Ambassador meetings,
- Inviting representatives of organizations that are connected to the service project area you've selected this year.

Planning your program

Being intentional in planning your Local 4-H Ambassador Program is key to establishing *and* maintaining a quality program. Whether you are starting a new program, restarting fresh, or sustaining an existing program, this section of the guide will cover the steps for designing a yearly plan for your local ambassador program.

- **If you are starting or restarting a local ambassador program**, begin at "Getting Started".
- **If you are working with an existing program**, skip to "Sustaining the Program;" however, revisiting your goals is always good practice.

Getting Started

As with the start of any program, the first steps take time, energy, and, frankly, courage. However, the result of this investment is a vibrant program built on the foundations of positive youth development and youth-adult partnerships. Below are the steps for getting your program started/restarted.

For each of these steps, you will be working collaboratively with your CEL Regional Extension Educator, so connect with them first.

Step 1: Establish the outline of the program

The first step to starting a local ambassador program is to establish the outline of the program. Begin by exploring the data about your 4-H program and the geographic area or population that you serve. Consider:

- How many middle school and high school-aged youth are there in your program, and how many live in your program area?
- What other leadership opportunities exist for teenage youth in your program?
- Why do you want to create an Ambassador program?

Then, consider the structure of your program, including:

- What grade levels will this program be open to?
- What is the maximum number of participants?
- Will there be an application? If not, how can youth sign up?
- What will the role of the staff and adult advisors be?
- What are some of the activities the Ambassadors might do?

Program Budget

Local 4-H Ambassador activities take time, energy, and financial resources. Expenses might include transportation, materials and supplies, food and beverages, awards, and facilities to complete their duties and plans. Local 4-H Ambassador teams must budget accordingly.

Many counties/Tribal Nations maintain a budget for Local 4-H Ambassadors that are funded through their Federation/Council accounts. This prevents seeking Federation/Council approval for individual expenses. Please consult the Budgeting Development and Approval guide for information on establishing and maintaining a budget. Consult with the Local 4-H educator for guidance on deadlines and processes.

Local Ambassador Programs should be funded by the local 4-H program. However, if the local budget is unable to cover the full extent of a youth's participation in the program, there may be additional funding available from other sources. Please contact your CEL Regional Extension Educator for information. **No youth should be unable to perform the duties of being a Local 4-H Ambassador due to a lack of financial resources.**

Fundraising

If you plan on holding a fundraiser specifically for the Local Ambassador Program, or if the Ambassadors would like to hold a fundraiser to support their local 4-H program, please review the Fundraiser Guidelines included in the Club Management Toolkit. Any fundraising activities for or by a Local Ambassador Program must adhere to these guidelines.

Additional grants from external agencies are often posted on the Minnesota 4-H Facebook page or are directly sent to youth and volunteers enrolled in Minnesota 4-H. Your community may also have funds available from other service organizations, the United Way, the Chamber of Commerce, banks, and more. Work with your Local 4-H Educator and Regional Operations Educator if interested in pursuing grants.

Step 2: Recruit youth participants and adult advisors

After outlining your program, the next step is recruitment. The best recruitment methods are those that are multimodal and multidirectional. Below is a table providing a few examples of recruitment strategies you may consider.

Types	Direct	Indirect
Physical	• Letter or note to a specific person	• Newsletter (mailed) • Postcards • Flier or poster
Verbal	• Invitation to a specific person to apply • Word of mouth	• Presentation to a group (e.g. visiting a classroom or speaking at a club meeting) • Host an open house or informational meeting for those interested to learn more
Electronic	• Email to a specific person	• Email blast • Social media post • Newsletter (emailed)

As you develop your recruitment strategies, be mindful of the current communication practices and needs of your local program. For example, it might not be financially feasible to send postcards to all eligible youth in your local program, or you may be working with a significant population that does not have internet access. Recruitment is also a crucial point to assess the level of access that diverse audiences have to your program.

The above strategies can also be applied to recruiting adult advisors. As a reminder, Adult Advisors must be screened Minnesota 4-H volunteers, so any adults that you recruit will have to go through the volunteer screening process if they are not already a current volunteer. Additional information can be found in the Adult Advisor Role Description in the Additional Resources section of this guide.

The program should reflect the demographics of the established geographic area (ie, county, tribal community, multi-county), so recruitment efforts should strive to engage under-represented youth and adult advisors. A flier for recruitment can be found in the Additional Resources section of this guide.

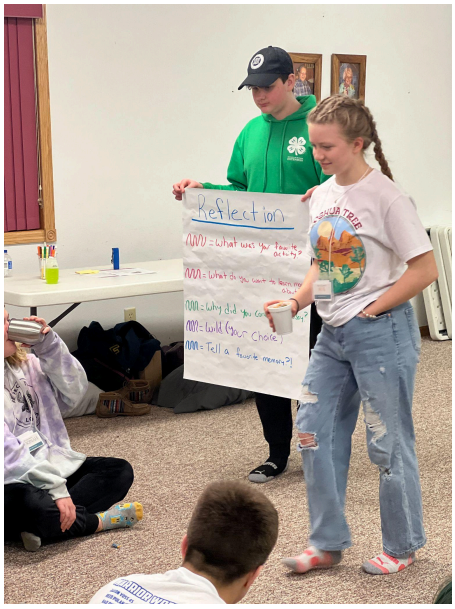
Step 3: Train staff, volunteers, and youth

After assembling the team, the next step is to orient and train your team in the Minnesota 4-H Local Ambassador Program Model. This is a step that will be led in partnership with your CEL Regional Educator. The **Local Ambassador Program Model training** is a comprehensive training involving 4.5 hours of content, and can be revisited every few years. The training will:

- Inform participants about what it means to be an Ambassador
- Orient participants to the key elements of the ambassador program
- Orient participants to their roles and responsibilities in the program
- Provide participants with opportunities to practice skills and to begin exploring what they will accomplish in their first year of the program

Often, these trainings are done with multiple local programs in attendance, which provides several benefits including networking opportunities and idea sharing.

Step 4: Develop your annual ambassador program plan



At the conclusion of the training, your group will begin the process of planning the ambassador program year. This plan is meant to guide your group through the various activities, events, and programs that you will be leading and/or participating in. Program Year Plans should be developed through a youth-adult partnership of all members of your local ambassador program. Though there are many ways this could be done, one method (the lesson called "On Sara's Pond") is suggested. Additionally, a template for the Annual Ambassador Program Plan is included in the Additional Resources section at the end of this guide. Once you have developed your plan, it should be submitted to your CEL Regional Educator.

Though individual programs should create their own identity responsive and related to local needs, all Local Ambassador programs should incorporate the four core components of Local Ambassador Programs: Education and Skill-Building Opportunities; Service; Promotion and Communication; and Opportunities for Inclusion & Networking.

Step 5: Evaluate your Local 4-H Ambassador Program

At the end of your program year, it is essential to evaluate your Local Ambassador Program. Evaluation and monitoring are vital to sustaining and improving our programs. Additionally, they are crucial for demonstrating the impact of the program.

Local 4-H Educators are expected to collaborate with the Ambassador Advisors to:

- Develop and implement a tool to maintain accurate records of all youth and adult participants (e.g. through attendance sheets) and report participation to the local staff person (e.g. turn in attendance sheets).
- Plan for when/how to incorporate Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) observations.
- Complete the annual Ambassador program survey each fall. The annual survey will be provided by the CEL team, and results will be shared with local program staff if at least 10 youth participate.

Sustaining an Ambassador Program

Step 1: Revisit your program outline

The start of a new year is an opportunity to reflect on your existing structure and, specifically, to apply the evaluation data you've collected to guide any changes to your structure. This step is something equivalent to home renovation: now that you've "lived" in the program for a while, consider the changes, additions, or removals that would be helpful to strengthen and support the youth in your program.

Here are some of the questions you might consider at this step:

- What changes to the size and/or structure of your program might be beneficial? Does it make sense to split into committees, elect officers, etc?
- What changes might need to be made to the selection process? Will the existing ambassadors need to apply again or does their membership "rollover"?
- Are there other access points where youth and adults can join the program mid-year?
- Was the program adequately funded? What additional funding might need to be allocated or planned for?
- Was adult support successful? What changes to adult involvement would help to strengthen the youth-adult partnership and make the program more successful?
- What additional resources would be helpful to have access to?

Local Ambassador Programs should go through **Local Ambassador Model Training** every few years. If your program has not gone through training recently, or if you wish to receive training again, contact your CEL Educator at this point to prepare for training in this program year.

Step 2: Recruit youth participants and adult advisors

Regardless of whether you've got a solid group of participants who want to stick around with the program or if all of your participants aged out, every new program year is an opportunity to recruit new youth and adult participants. Depending upon what changes you've made or plan on making, you may have specific times for or

methods of recruitment that make more sense for your program, but in general, the suggestions that were identified above (see Step 2 page 16) still apply.

Be mindful of the current communication practices and needs of your local program. Recruitment is also a crucial point to assess the level of access that diverse audiences have to your program.

Step 3: Orient and train participants

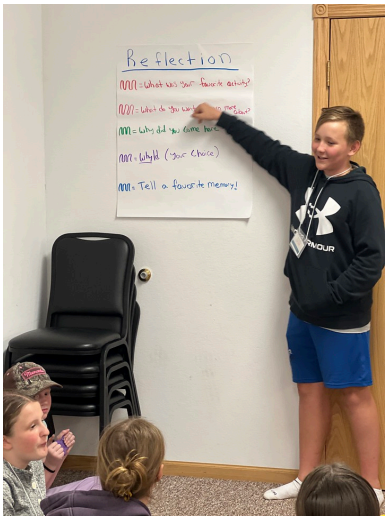
While many of your participants may have participated in local ambassador training or have a working knowledge of the program from having been in it, new participants will need to be oriented and trained to their roles and the work of the team.

Here are some ideas to orient and train new participants:

- Utilize older and/or existing members of the program to provide training
- Hold a new member night and/or incorporate team-building activities to introduce new members to each other and your existing group
- Have existing members present about what they did last year

For more ideas on how to orient and train new members, contact your CEL Regional Educator. Additionally, if, during Step 1, you determined that your group will receive Local Ambassador Model Training, you will complete that training during this step.

Step 4: Plan your Ambassador program year



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Additional Resources

Recruitment resources

- 4-H Ambassador advisor role description: A template job description that can be customized with your local 4-H program's contact information
- 4-H Ambassador application: A sample application for youth to join your Ambassador program.
- 4-H Ambassador training recruitment flier: A sample flier to recruit youth to attend an Ambassador training/kickoff.

Program planning tools

Local Ambassador Program Orientation: A resource is directly linked to the MN 4-H Local Ambassador Program Guide and serves as talking points in orienting local Educators and Ambassador Advisors to the local 4-H Ambassador program.

On Sara's Pond: A collaborative planning activity to be used with youth and adults when planning their Ambassador program year. The activity is meant to include youth voice in a respectful, thoughtful, and intentional way.

- On Sara's Pond lesson plan
- On Sara's Pond slide deck

4-H Ambassador Annual Program Plan: A tool to build an intentional plan for your Ambassador program year. This should be submitted annually to your regional extension educator for civic engagement & leadership.

- 8.5" x 11" template
- 11" x 17" template

Content-related resources

4-H Local Ambassador Curriculum: Lessons developed specifically for Minnesota 4-H Ambassador programs. *Updates are planned for April 2025, send suggestions to CEL team members.*

Evaluation & monitoring resources

Periodic reporting guidance (staff-only): A guide for reporting about 4-H groups, events, and activities.

Annual 4-H Ambassador survey: Coming in spring 2025, a survey tool that will gather impact data on 4-H Ambassador programs. *For more information, contact Jacquie Lonning, jlonning@umn.edu.*