



Citizenship: A National 4-H Mission Mandate

Citizenship is a set of abilities that give youth the capacity to move beyond one's self-interest and to be committed to the well-being of their community and their world. It is about enabling youth to envision the future and make decisions on their own. Citizenship is an important part of our 4-H mission that empowers youth to take positive action to create the quality of life they desire for themselves and their communities.

"Active citizenship" is the philosophy that all citizens should work toward the betterment of their community through financial giving, public service, and volunteer work to improve life for everyone. Since these habits must be learned and developed, 4-H uses a learn-by-doing approach to teach active citizenship. Learning of this kind requires an environment where youth can flourish and grow, one where they can express their opinions and feelings without embarrassment or fear of rejection.

Since citizenship is an ongoing and intentional process, it is important that 4-H leaders understand that they can provide positive opportunities, support and resources for young people to become engaged and to make a difference in their communities.

Turn to the four H's as a guide when designing opportunities for your club members to develop their citizenship abilities:

Head

Help youth see opportunities for ***Independent*** thinking. Provide them with citizenship knowledge and understanding that focuses on relevant, real-life issues facing young people and society. Encourage them to think for themselves and develop skills necessary for group decision making.

Heart

Create the environment for club members to feel that they ***Belong***. Set the stage for a positive relationship with a caring adult in a safe, inclusive environment. Help members understand themselves and broaden their view of their place in the world around them, recognizing the responsibility they have to show compassion for others.

Hands

Design opportunities for 4-H'ers to practice ***Generosity***. Guide youth to put their imagination to work as they practice service for others. Encourage and guide them to serve, first through their 4-H club and county wide 4-H involvement, then, on their own in the community. See *10 Steps Toward Performing a Successful Community Service*.

Health

Provide guidance and support for youth to develop a sense of ***Mastery*** as their citizenship abilities grow. Such abilities contribute to healthy lifestyles and healthy communities. Work in partnership with youth in planning, implementing, and evaluating community service projects. Take time to discuss the leadership skills gained and also celebrate the success of the service project. Reflecting on the impact of their service on themselves, others, and the entire community will help prepare 4-H'ers for a lifetime of active citizenship.



You could also use the following resource as a guide:

- Citizenship Adventure Kit

Description: Designed to engage youth in changing a piece of the public world, discovering the possibilities of democratic citizenship and building a commitment to taking action in new and exciting ways. Youth plan a project that will create, change, or improve.

<http://www.4-hmall.org/detail.aspx?ID=736855>

Written by Macy Compton and Rachel Lyons.

References

National 4-H Headquarters Mission Mandate: Citizenship.
<http://www.fourhcouncil.edu/citizenship.aspx>

Congresslink provides information about the U.S. Congress, how it works, its members and leaders and the public policies that it produces.
<http://www.congresslink.org>

Civic Engagement: Afterschool Activities for Citizenship, Leadership and Service.
http://www.4-hafterschool.org/uploadedFiles/Resource_Guides/CivicEngagementAfterSchoolActivities.pdf

For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit www.nj4h.rutgers.edu.

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