The Power of Youth in a Changing World

Youth are powerful, energetic, committed members of society, whose strength as leaders is the core of the 4-H youth development movement. Youth have the power to contribute significantly to communities, to be equal and caring partners, to create positive change, and to imagine new possibilities and directions. As young people learn, building their skills and knowledge, their power increases.

The 4-H youth development movement brings young people and their families together with volunteers, community members, and professionals in a powerful partnership through which all involved learn and grow. Today as never before, the 4-H'er's pledge to work for the betterment of the community, the country, and the world can be realized: the success of the 4-H movement can have a worldwide impact.

Countries, regions, and people all over the world are coming closer together through integrated economies, advances in technology, and global communications and marketing. For people and cultures to thrive, the next generation must be prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to build strong economies and with the values and principles necessary to nurture successful societies, communities, and families. 4-H youth will live in a world in which accepting and living with diversity, understanding the individual's impact on the well-being of others, and sharing the human dream of a better future are not only desirable but essential.

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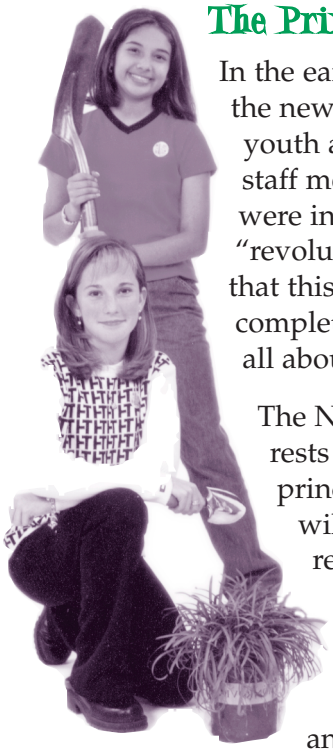
The National 4-H Strategic Plan • Executive Summary

The Principles



In the early phases of developing the new strategic plan for 4-H, youth and adults, volunteers and staff members and supporters were invited to be part of the "revolution" coming to 4-H. Now that this planning cycle is almost complete, what is the revolution all about?

The National 4-H Strategic Plan rests on five fundamental principles which, if achieved, will indeed create a revolution for the 4-H youth development movement. Like the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Information Revolution, this is a progression towards the fullest achievement of our destiny, making our ideals and values become reality for everyone we encounter. The strategic plan provides the spark, the inspiration to get the revolution started.

What are the revolutionary principles? Celebrating the power of youth, widening the circle and welcoming others, changing lives through experiential learning, helping our people to flourish, perfecting the ways we work. These are principles we have always valued, but too often we have been willing to compromise, to be satisfied with partial victory. We can be satisfied no longer: the realities of 21st-century America demand that we live our principles fully, every day in everything we do. If we settle for nothing less, 4-H will never be the same.

The Process

The National 4-H Strategic Planning process was led by the Strategic Directions Team. Discovery Teams made up of youth, volunteers, and youth development professionals, who gathered information from thousands of youth and adults from all over the country, assembled answers to critical questions about 4-H's future:

- What critical issues and important opportunities must 4-H explore?
- What does 4-H have now that should be used to our advantage?
- How must we change in order to create the future we want for ourselves and for America's youth?

The answers served as a guide for the Strategic Directions Team to follow and, combined with vital information from the fields of youth development, public policy, and community-based leadership, grew into the National 4-H Strategic Plan.

The Plan

The plan can be encapsulated in its goals, which are expressed in the present tense, capturing the vision of what the 4-H youth development movement will be like when the revolutionary principles become reality. But it's just the beginning, a place to start for making revolutionary changes.

The Power of Youth. If we really care about youth, if we really want them to succeed, we must reorganize around them. Ask yourself, "What does it take for youth to become fully engaged as valued partners? Am I not only providing leadership opportunities and gaining the unique perspectives of youth but also transforming the relationships we have with youth in designing, delivering, and governing 4-H programs?"

Goals:

- 4-H will create a culture in which youth are equal partners in decision-making and governance.
- 4-H youth will be full partners, resources, and contributors in developing, delivering, and evaluating our educational experiences.
- 4-H youth will develop an ethic of philanthropy and civic engagement.
- Youth will lead 4-H in new and creative technological directions.

Access, Equity, and Opportunity. We know what 4-H can do in the lives of young people. Now, more than ever before, we must ensure that 4-H serves all communities by providing equitable access and opportunity for all youth, volunteers, and staff. We must be aggressive in reaching unserved, underserved, and under-represented children and their families and in leveraging our extensive networks and technology to help people make decisions and solve problems.

Goals:

- Extension and 4-H will develop an ethic of access and opportunity for all youth.
- 4-H will invest in youth and their future by providing equitable access and opportunity to all communities.
- The 4-H volunteer and staff community, at all levels, will be skilled and knowledgeable in

interacting with children and families from diverse groups.
- 4-H will become technologically savvy so that 4-H youth and adults will thrive in a technology-based society.

An Extraordinary Place to Learn. We know that good educational experiences can change a child's life. 4-H combines an imaginative, motivational learning environment with outstanding curriculum. We must use our scholarship and practice in the field of experiential learning to revolutionize the ways youth build confidence and master critical life skills in all 4-H activities.

Goals:

- 4-H youth development will strengthen the relationship between research and practice using the resources of land-grant and other university systems.
- 4-H will imagine and design new, unconventional educational models to capitalize on emerging opportunities and engage the hearts and minds of youth.
- 4-H will use new technologies to shape 4-H learning opportunities that go beyond boundaries of geography, time, expertise, and leadership.
- 4-H will promote scientific and technological literacy.
- 4-H will maximize the effectiveness of our delivery modes.
- 4-H will collect national impact and accountability data that fully demonstrates the impact of 4-H on youth, their families, and communities.

Exceptional People, Innovative Practices. We know people are our strength. In fact, attracting, training, supporting, and rewarding our youth, volunteers, and employees is our most important investment. We want people to flourish, to have a chance to change their lives because of 4-H.

Goals:

- Extension and 4-H will recruit, hire, and retain top-notch people who have a heart for working with youth and an enduring commitment to youth development.
- 4-H will design volunteer management systems which attract, retain, and energize youth and adult volunteers with a progressive and enduring commitment to youth.
- Extension and 4-H will invest in its people by providing exceptional learning opportunities.
- Extension, 4-H, and our land grant institutions will advance the field of youth development education.

Effective Organizational Systems. Great institutions survive because their missions are timeless, ethical, and imperative. Yet while the 4-H mission endures, new approaches to achieve the mission require new ways of thinking and working. We need a deeper understanding of how can we be the best.

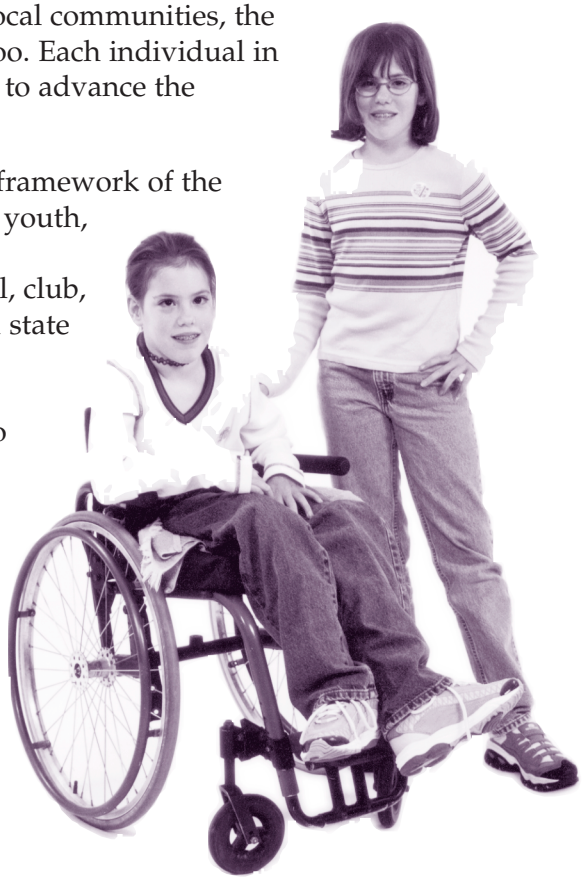
Goals:

- The 4-H mission and strategic plan will be achieved through the synergy of shared leadership.
- Strategic collaboration and partnerships will be an integral part of achieving the 4-H mission.
- 4-H will create bold, innovative, resource-development initiatives.
- The 4-H brand will be readily recognized, exciting, and appealing to all 4-H's audiences.
- Extension and the Land Grant System will support the expanding role of 4-H professionals as community resources in youth development research and practice.
- 4-H will develop, implement, and broadly communicate a research agenda for 4-H youth development.

The Power

We stand at the threshold of a 4-H youth development revolution. The power to make it happen lives in you. Because the 4-H movement thrives in local communities, the plan will, too. Each individual in 4-H can act to advance the revolution.

Within the framework of the plan, every youth, volunteer, professional, club, county, and state will create actions and strategies to turn the revolution into reality.



4-H Values

We, the youth and adults of the 4-H movement, value
Youth as powerful members of society
Youth and adults as caring partners
Learning as a lifelong commitment
Diversity and social conscience
Doing our best and making it better

Therefore

We believe that youth are powerful members of society, with the ability to contribute significantly to their communities, to create positive change, and to imagine new possibilities and directions.We believe that youth are equal and caring partners, bringing unique energy, knowledge, and perspective to the work they do—they are keepers of the vision.

We believe that relationships with caring adults are essential for youth to achieve their potential because of the guidance, respect, knowledge, and wisdom adults can share.

We believe that learning is a lifelong commitment that enhances self-determination, independent thinking, and self-esteem, and that learning-by-doing promotes practical skills, confidence, and experience for both youth and adults.

We believe that a social conscience is built on service and volunteerism, that a commitment to diversity depends on embracing and respecting difference, and that both are essential to making our society a better place.

We believe that our youth are the future of our nation and our world, and that they deserve nothing less than our best.

Because we believe in these things, we touch the future through the 4-H youth development movement.

4-H Youth Development Vision

A world in which youth and adults learn, grow, and work together as catalysts for positive change.

4-H Youth Development Mission

4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnership with caring adults.

The National Strategic Directions Team is made up of leading innovators representing 4-H youth, volunteers, and faculty from across the country and their most strategic partners, National 4-H Council and the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. Their task is to address the most fundamental challenge of our time: how to pioneer innovative strategies in 4-H Youth Development for the next generation.

October 2001 Production Team: Extension Marketing, Texas Cooperative Extension

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